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PAUL
REVERE
SQUARE

BOOKS BY LOUISE ANDREWS KENT

Novels

THE TERRACE

PAUL REVERE SQUARE

Children's Stories

THE RED RAJAH

DOUGLAS OF PORCUPINE

TWO CHILDREN OF TYRE

HE WENT WITH MARCO POLO

HE WENT WITH VASCO DA GAMA

(with Ellis Parker Butler)

JO ANN, TOMBOY

Paul Revere Square

LOUISE

ANDREWS

KENT

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON

The Riverside Press Cambridge



1939

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PAUL
REVERE
SQUARE

EBENEZER JOCELEYN
1839-1906

m. (1) SOPHIA CARTER
1850-1883

m. (2) MARTHA SUTTON
1860-1900

NICHOLAS
1872-1937

JOHN
1875-1930

m. ELEANOR ROWE

ANNA
1878-

m. CLARENCE KEITH
d. 1924

ELIZABETH
1880-

m. BERTRAM SHATSWELL

SOPHIA
1883-

m. PRINCE SERGE
LOBANOV

STEPHEN
1888-1936

m. CAROL WILLARD
d. 1920

NICHOLAS II
1908-

EBENEZER
1908-

WILLIAM
1909-

SINGLETON
1921-

PETER
1913-

DIANA
1916-

Chapter 1

GASTRONOMIC INTRODUCTION

IT WAS THROUGH two fried eggs that Diana Jocene finally met her Uncle Nicholas.

She had been living in his house for a week — the grayest, gloomiest week of her life. Even the months since her father's death had not seemed so dreary. The neighbors in East Alcott had been kind and curious. Even if in some cases curiosity had outweighed kindness, it was better than the blank indifference of Paul Revere Square.

Then in East Alcott there had been the bustle of getting ready for the auction and the excitement of the auction itself. There had always been the hope in the back of her mind that in the crowd there would appear some distinguished stranger — she had always thought he would have a monocle and a white mustache that pricked up towards it — who would recognize her father's genius and buy his pictures. This expert had never materialized, so the pictures had been stacked away in the Wilburs' barn. Bertha Wilbur had covered them with an old quilt.

Luckily the enthusiasm for boxes of old iron, for glass bowls acquired with packages of X-ray Cleanser, and for art squares — the name optimistically given in East Alcott to any floor covering larger than a bathmat — had brought in enough to pay the bills. There were not many. The Joceneyn hatred of debt lived on in Stephen in spite of the impractical streak that had made an unsuccessful painter of him and lost him his fortune. Last year he had sold the big house with its view across surging billows of hills to Couching Lion's grave profile. He and Diana had moved into the red cottage near the store.

She felt homesick suddenly, not only for Couching Lion and her father's singing as he painted, but for the rhythm of Vermont speech. It was like a valley road, she thought. Sometimes it swooped and dipped. Sometimes it ran along level a little way. It might come to an abrupt stop or slide along easily or rise suddenly to an unexpected height. Nothing could force the road into a rectangular pattern. Nothing could force the speech into the neatly clipped phrases of Paul Revere Square.

To be sure Diana's experience of conversation in Paul Revere Square was not large. There had been the two small boys who roller-skated past the open window one afternoon. And the fat man with a briefcase, who said to a thin man with a green bag: 'If that lunatic would only give us a breathing-spell ...'

The thin man had merely grunted.

There was the lady in the plaid tweeds with the five pepper-and-salt tweed dogs and the picturesque woman, using two Russian wolf hounds in her scheme of exterior decoration, who seemed impervious to the plaid-tweed one's conversation, which was technical.

'Nothing like vermifuge. Quarts of it. I use quarts of it,' roared the stout dog-lover.

None of these remarks was addressed to Diana. In fact the only ones that were had consisted of phrases such as, 'Very good, moddom,' 'I could hardly say, moddom,' and 'Luncheon is served, moddom.'

These represented Burwell, the butler's, contribution to the art of conversation. Compared to the two aged ladies who waited on the table at lunch, Burwell was positively loquacious.

Diana dipped a heavy silver spoon into a Dresden cup. There was a gray liquid in the cup. She supposed it was soup. The iridescent bubbles on top suggested that it was not water.

'Perhaps there is soap in it,' Diana thought, stirring it cautiously. 'It smells a little like soap.'

Minna, the one of the two maids whose feet seemed to hurt the least, waddled up with three health wafers on a silver plate. Diana took two and looked wistfully at the other. It would taste, she knew, of hay — not of this year's hay, but of the kind left in wisps on the rafters from last year. Still it was more strengthening than the lukewarm soup. She did not take the third health wafer. Minna would consider her greedy.

Diana put down her spoon. Minna lumbered away with the cup. Sarah, who had been standing beside the black-walnut sideboard with a disapproving expression about her elbows, limped to the table and removed non-existent crumbs with a piece of folded damask.

'I hope it will not be the lamb again,' Diana thought. But although it looked like chips from the wood basket, it was

the lamb. She could tell because chips do not have streaks of gristle.

Once more there were boiled potatoes, dark and damp in a Minton dish. And yet again parsnips. Some people like parsnips.

Diana thought: 'I could go back to East Alcott. Bertha Wilbur would let me work for my board. They never have parsnips till March. But I can't go. I haven't money enough. And I haven't seen Uncle Nicholas. Perhaps he'll send for me today.'

Sarah hunted for more crumbs with the shining damask. She carried away on a silver tray the ones she had not found. She breathed hard from her exertions.

Diana looked out into Paul Revere Square. Through the right-hand window she could see the tail of Paul Revere's horse, a piece of iron railing, some brown grass. Behind the flowing bronze tail was the dull red brick, white paint, polished brass, and shining glass — some of it purple — of the houses across the Square. It was raining and the water was dripping off Paul Revere's horse's tail.

Even in the rain the Square looked more cheerful than Nicholas Jockey's dining-room with its dark green walls and mustard-brown curtains and black-walnut woodwork.

'I wonder if rich people always have such ugly houses, and such awful food.'

Diana tried to chisel some of the tapioca cream out of the crystal dessert glass. Fish eggs and glue her father used to call it. She had never known why before.

'It must be an old family receipt,' she thought. 'No wonder father went to Vermont.'

She gave up the unequal combat with the tapioca. While

the ceremony of the fingerbowl was being carried out, she looked first out the left-hand window through which she could see Paul Revere's horse's nose and a bare magnolia tree, then into the pier glass between the windows.

It was a misty, wavy greenish glass in a dim, greenish-gold frame. In its depths Nicholas Joceneyn's dining-room looked to his niece like something under the sea; like some dark cavern hung with brown and green kelp. Those dark carved shapes — cupboards merely to Minna and Sarah — were the fittings of some lost ship, a Joceneyn ship that had sailed out of Boston for Canton. Down she went in a williwaw back of Cape Horn and her cargo with her. There was porcelain in it: the blue Canton, the Nanking, the green Fitzhugh, the Lowestoft with its painted ship and its starred blue border. The twisted handles and the pomegranate-knobbed covers floated and drifted and wavered in the green glass.

If a mermaid were needed, Diana would do. She had bright gold hair, not swirling around like the hair of most mermaids, but braided in a neat crown around her head. In spite of the dim green light this mermaid had no undersea unhealthy pallor. Her pink seashell-tinted cheeks indicated that she must have spent a good deal of time sunning herself on the rocks. She also had the unmermaidlike attributes of a short tilted nose with six freckles on it, soft velvety-brown eyes under arched brows of dark gold, and a mouth and chin that looked somehow older than the rest of her face: older, as old as most mermaids, a ripe old age, twenty-one and a quarter, say. Or perhaps only sadder than most mermaids, a race with enviable facial control.

Diana herself did not notice these details.

She only thought: 'I look green in that glass. How many

days shall I sit here, looking green, greener? Waiting? Until I look like an old sea urchin . . . Can urchins be old? Well, like an old moss-covered statue — sea moss, of course . . . Forever, probably. In this house nothing ever happens.'

She was wrong. She had only minutes to wait.

As she left the dining-room, Burwell came through the hall. He was carrying a tray well loaded with porcelain and silver. There was food on it, too. Food that suggested that the Joceneyn kitchen led a double life. Impossible, remembering the soup, the prehistoric scrags of lamb, to imagine that out of it could have come this noble fish, brown, buttery, hot in its nest of lemon and parsley.

Diana gazed hungrily after it as Burwell stamped up the dark stairs and disappeared into the room at the head of them.

A voice from it growled: 'What's that thing you've got there?'

'Mr. Eben sent it. Thinking you might fancy it. It's — sea-trout, sir,' wheezed Burwell.

'There is no such fish. Take it away!' roared the voice. 'I asked for eggs, didn't I? TWO . . . FRIED . . . EGGS.'

'Uncle Nicholas sounds better,' thought Diana.

She sat down in the room near the front door. It was furnished in a style that had much in it of the coziness of Napoleon's tomb, but at least it was warm, which was not true either of her own room or of the den of rubber plants, bronze statues, and locked glass cases known as the library.

Burwell came panting down the stairs again. Diana heard him shouting down the dumb waiter. He did not sound pleased.

Last night's *Transcript* was the most up-to-date reading

matter on the table. That is, part of it was there. Burwell kept in touch with affairs in China and all the kitchen with the current trend in *débutante parties*. The classified advertisements were intact.

Diana began to read them.

A kind, cheerful, experienced woman would take your dog to walk... (and give him vermifuge? I'd take him myself, the darling!)... Apples wrapped in cellophane... (But they haven't thought of anything to wrap cellophane in yet)... Accordion lessons... (Minna and Sarah wouldn't like it)... Sell Christmas cards. Handsome profit... (But you have to buy the cards and I have only \$2.71. Besides, I don't know anyone in Boston except Minna and Sarah and Burwell. And Burwell is the only one who seems to know me. Also they are whimsical cards. And Burwell looks as whimsical as Plymouth Rock)...

Burwell plodded upstairs again.

Diana's eye fell on another advertisement.

Would you like a **LISTENER**? I will listen to your troubles, the story of your golf match, the bright sayings of your little ones. Tell me what you think of the Administration. I never answer back. A slight extra charge for looking at motion pictures of your trip abroad. The Help A Bit Shop. Bulfinch 7770.

Diana chuckled.

'I would like a Listener,' she thought, 'only, of course, I can't pay for one. And I really haven't much to say because nothing ever hap——'

Upstairs there was a crash.

'I said **FRIED EGGS!** **EGGS!** **EGGS!** Not corrugated paper fried in lard. I said **BASTED!** Hannah knows I

want them basted. Who cooked these slices of giraffe with the hair on?’

‘I think,’ Diana murmured, ‘that my Uncle Nicholas is a lot better.’

Burwell’s voice — he sounds like a nervous steam roller with a sore throat, Diana thought — said: ‘But, Mr. Joceneyn, sir. Hannah is out. It’s Wednesday, sir. Directly she cooked the fish, she went. It was the kitchenmaid cooked them . . . The china, sir. You’ve no call to break it, sir. Forty years, man and boy . . . But a Dresden plate . . . Egg on the curtains . . . Mr. Joceneyn, it’s not like you, sir.’

‘My aim’s bad or that dinosaur’s egg would be on you, not the curtains. Go back and get me some decently cooked hen’s eggs. And BASTED. Next time I won’t miss you. Did you hear me?’

‘Yes, Mr. Joceneyn.’

Diana looked out into the hall. Burwell’s neatly striped gray trousers flickered through the black-walnut bannisters. His face was a reddish purple and he muttered disjointedly: ‘Forty years . . . curtains . . . Dresden . . . No call.’

‘A fried egg,’ roared the voice from above, ‘should look like a snow-covered hill with the dawn on it. Like a bride with a chiffon veil over her face. Do you hear me, Burwell?’

‘Yes, Mr. Joceneyn.’

‘Not like blotting-paper. Or honeycomb tripe. Or a broiled bath sponge. Do you hear that?’

‘Yes, sir.’

Burwell had reached the bottom step. He leaned against the wall. Minna and Sarah from the dining-room doorway looked aghast at the tray with its fragments of china and egg-smearred napkins. To Burwell’s low-voiced suggestion that

one of them should try her hand at the eggs, they retorted, as to a suggested indecency, that cooking was not their work. Then they retreated to the china closet and set up a discreet clinking of glass and silver.

Diana said gently: 'I'll cook them, Burwell. My father liked them that way.'

That Burwell's face could actually shine with a mixture of relief, humility, and friendliness had to be seen to be believed. Diana hardly believed it herself as she hurried after him down the dark flight of stairs to the kitchen.

The news that Mr. Nicholas Joceneyn did not care for his eggs turned and fried hard had evidently penetrated below stairs. At the table sat a figure with a blue-and-white checked apron thrown over its head.

From under the apron came moans, sniffs, and a voice that wailed: 'Wirra, wisha, what'll I do at all?'

'Get me some eggs, some table butter, and a clean frying-pan,' Diana said crisply.

The apron came down revealing a mop of curly brown hair, a pink, tearstained face with enormous gray eyes and a small mouth, that promptly swallowed its last moan, grinned cheerfully, and remarked: 'Praise the saints!'

'When I heard them roars out of him I thought sure my Aunt Hannah would have me killed,' she added, slamming a frying-pan down on a range about the size and plan of a pipe organ. 'There's good heat in it now, Miss, and here's the thread and needle, though how anyone can baste an egg and it slipping around, I wouldn't be knowing. I sewed up fowls home, but there's queer ways here!'

Basting, Diana said gravely, was only pouring hot fat over the top of the egg while it was cooking. It made a

white coating over the yolk and the whole egg got done at once, and none of it got too hard. Just right, in fact.

Her uncle would like hot toast. And a hot plate. That blue willowware one on the back of the stove would do. And a hot soup dish to put over it. Hot willowware was better than cold Dresden. If Burwell would fix a tray with a clean napkin she would take it up herself. Because she could run and Burwell must be tired, climbing all those stairs. And could she borrow an apron, please, a white one?

The kitchenmaid actually knew how to make toast, and she produced a white apron as stiff as if it had been hung out to dry at forty below, an apron of sobriety.

Burwell seemed to have left his somewhat peevish dignity upstairs. He beamed upon Diana as she slid her arms through the apron straps. It was too big for her, but so were most of her clothes, he had noticed. He wished now that he had not said so firmly in the servants' dining-room that Stephen Joceneyn's daughter had No Style.

'Countrified. Very countrified,' he had told Hannah.

He regretted the remark now. He agreed benevolently about the toast; agreed that Mr. Joceneyn would like tea.

'There's tea on the back of the stove. It's got good strength to it,' suggested the kitchenmaid helpfully.

Diana said that if it reached Mr. Joceneyn, they would all be drowned in it and they would deserve it.

'Get his own Lapsang Souchong and his teapot,' she said. 'The flowery Canton one in the red-lined basket.'

Seeing Burwell's plump cheeks lengthen in surprise, she added, 'All Joceneyns have them. They all sneeze three times if they sneeze once, make Lapsang Souchong in those teapots, and eat lemon pie with a spoon. Don't they?'

She smiled and Burwell smiled too. It hardly seemed to hurt his pursed-up mouth at all. He produced the teapot and a high-shouldered Lowestoft tea-caddy. The kettle was just starting to sing.

Diana slid the eggs into the hot butter. There was a delicious sizzling and popping. She spooned up the hot liquid and poured it over the tops. The kitchen filled with fragrance: the clean, crisp smell of toasting bread mingling with the smoky, flowery scent as boiling water met the tea in the warmed pot.

In the pan bells of gold changed to pink suns veiled by the morning mist.

Mr. Nicholas Joceneyn's eggs were ready.

Chapter 2

LUNCHEON IS SERVED

IN THE BLACK-AND-GOLD lacquer bed with its curtains of faded crimson Nicholas Joceleyn sat gasping for breath. Pain clawed at his chest and flickered along his left arm. He reached for the box of pearl-colored pills, but the pain eased off and he lay back against the pillows. He was so pale now that in the gray afternoon light from Paul Revere Square the only thing that showed he was there at all was the straight black bar of silky hair that separated the benevolent mass of his forehead from the fierce curve of his nose and his tired, pale eyes.

A little color began to come back into his face and thin lips. It was possible to see now that, in spite of its many inconsistencies, in spite of the hollowed cheeks and gaunt jaw, it was an impressive face, even a handsome one.

He was scowling, but the scowl was for himself.

'Thought I'd learned my lesson,' he muttered. 'Fool . . . Attack two weeks ago . . . ought to have been enough. Grippe hasn't helped it . . . Seventeen kinds of a fool . . . Lomond

told me . . . Talking to myself,' he added, hardly above a whisper — 'must be going crazy.'

He was silent, but the voice ran on in his head: 'Burwell's right. Ought not to throw things. Unworthy of a man of my vocabulary.'

His lips twitched a little and fell into a gentler curve. There was a gleam of amusement in the light gray eyes.

'Poor Burwell,' he thought. 'He's probably lost a couple of pounds. Well it won't do him any harm. Those eggs — why, it's mutiny, barratry, and an agrarian outrage. Not to mention that fish. A sea-trout indeed! Eben ought to stick to skiing. What did he want, I wonder? Something, I'll bet a couple of fish bones. Never knew him to come around with a tactful little present unless . . . Well, he's the only one of the lot who works anyway.' Nicholas Jockeyln muttered and shut his eyes again.

He tried to shake off the thought of his nephews. There were five of them, and there was something about each one that troubled him. There was Bill Shatswell who had spent most of his twenty-eight years and large sums of money in the society of horses. Occasionally Bill wandered in and out of some business, but as most of them seemed to interfere with that noble animal, the horse, they did not hold Bill's attention long. Just now it was real estate. So far Bill's preoccupation with it had not distracted his attention from his riding. Bill had married when he was only nineteen. Now he was a widower with two children. He lived with his mother-in-law in Paul Revere Square and seemed cheerful about it. Anyone who could live cheerfully with Mrs. Caldwell Nesbitt must have a remarkable disposition. In fact the excellence of Bill's disposition was generally acknowledged.

He was the son of Nicholas Joceneyn's sister Bessie. Bessie Shatswell had — as she often remarked with her usual vague good nature — two only children. Singleton was eleven years younger than Bill and as different as a young hawk is from a handsome mallard drake. Mrs. Shatswell was rather like a benevolent puddle duck who had hatched both. She spoiled them, of course. Everyone in the Square said so. Bill's capacity for backing the wrong horse in a steeplechase did not seem to trouble her any more than Singleton's ferocious manners and his habit of blowing out fuses with his electrical experiments. Of course it was inconvenient to have the lights go out just when she was entertaining her bridge club, but then Sing always replaced the fuse. And he was handy about fixing the electric iron on Tuesdays. As to the scowl that Singleton at seventeen kept to face the world with, his mother had never seen it. People in Bessie Shatswell's company generally showed a softer side if they had one.

That either of the Shatswells would ever be of use in Joceneyn & Company: Tea Merchants, never occurred to their uncle. Sometimes he thought that Peter Lobanov, son of his sister Sophia and that Russian Prince, might have helped. But of course Sophia had put a spoke in that wheel. Sophia had never objected to absorbing her share of the profits of Joceneyn & Company, but when it came to having her son — a sensitive, artistic boy like Peter — tied down to that sordid routine, she rebelled.

Peter had seemed happy enough to his uncle during the two weeks he had spent in the packing department. He had made numerous mistakes, of course; had even disastrously managed to get a batch of the Red Star blend into the Gold

Star boxes. He was rather like a puppy playing with a new ball. He dashed all over the place upsetting things. His fair hair was always on end. He spilled ink, spilled papers, spilled tea. Yet somehow Nicholas Joceneyn felt that Peter might have been some good — sometime. There had been no chance to prove Nicholas wrong. Almost before the Red Star tea had been returned to the proper boxes, Peter was on his way to Paris to study painting.

It would be a shame to stifle his talent, his mother alleged. She went to Paris too. And to Cannes and the Lido and Palm Beach and Bermuda. She took Peter to all those centers of art and culture. There was a picture he painted in Bermuda of a human eye in a Dry Martini that was considered a great advance on anything he had done in Paris.

Nicholas Joceneyn did not care particularly what Peter painted. He had written Peter off his books and could think of him without any feeling beyond a weary pity. The sore spot in his mind was that made by his namesake, Nicholas Joceneyn II. Like most sore spots it was hard to keep out of the way. It was like an infected finger. Even when it stopped aching there was the temptation to press it and see if it still hurt. What Nick had done still hurt.

There was nothing really wrong about it. Nicholas Joceneyn was fair-minded enough to admit that. It was only that Nick, who had gone out to China as a buyer of tea for Joceneyn & Company, had left them in the lurch and started flying for Chiang Kai-Shek's army. Nick had always been crazy about planes and was a skillful pilot. It was easy enough to understand why he had been tempted. Adventure, Nicholas Joceneyn realized, must be fun — if you could afford it. He never had been able to himself.

He did not blame Nick for getting rid of the headaches caused by trying to buy tea in China with the Japanese blowing the place to bits. It was only that he had always hoped that Nick would come home and settle down in Paul Revere Square, marry some nice girl, walk across the Common every morning beside him to the big building with the gilt dragons fighting over the door, some day be President of the company.

It had been just wishful thinking, he realized. There was no reason why Nick, who had plenty of money — the money that his father had made in the tea business — should settle down to the humdrum life of Paul Revere Square.

There was no one but Eben. He was a conscientious chap, Eben. Early to bed. Prompt at the office. His list of virtues was a long one. Only somehow Eben invariably annoyed his uncle.

‘That sea-trout. Ridiculous. It was a haddock probably. And I’m still hungry,’ Nicholas Joceneyn thought crossly. ‘Lunch — why, it’s supper-time practically.’

He considered roaring at Burwell again. There was a certain amount of pleasure in making Burwell jump, but with the memory of the pain that had bitten its fierce way into his arm, it scarcely seemed worth while. Besides, there were footsteps on the stairs: light, swift footsteps, not Burwell’s thumping tread.

‘Afraid to come up,’ Nicholas Joceneyn thought, grimly amused, and putting out a thin hand to switch on the goose-necked lamp.

This anachronism in the big room with its tea-chest paper of pale gold, its clash of crimson brocade and scarlet lacquer, threw a faint circle of bluish light on the old man’s sharply etched face and narrow, big-veined hands.

Outside the circle of light the room was dim. Diana had a confused sense of strange shapes: camels and horses and elephants; of jars of colors only half seen — pale greens and grays and blues, of a subtle blending of all three, of gleaming red that was neither scarlet nor crimson. She did not speak, but quietly set down the tray on the invalid's table that stretched across the bed.

Her uncle said nothing. He lifted the Canton teapot from its hot scarlet nest, poured out the tea into the kitchen cup of blue willow, breathed in its warm perfume, and left it cooling, a little pool of pale, clear topaz, while he attacked the eggs. About their gold-and-white perfection, or the smoky, pungency of the tea, or the hot crispness of the toast, he said nothing. To Diana this silence implied praise. Her father had seldom mentioned the food unless there was something wrong with it.

Probably, she thought, all Jocene men were like that. The idea that all men were like that did not occur to her. She had not known many.

She waited quietly for the tray. From the window she could see down into Paul Revere Square. Darkness was creeping up out of it. Rain slithered down into it and over the cars parked across the street. Two of them were high-studded limousines with sharp-angled roofs and radiators: the kind of car that has plenty of room for a pompadour with a dowager's stiff-crowned hat perched on it and a wired velvet bow perched on the hat. One of the cars had brass-trimmed lamps beside the windshield. Their polish shone like gold in the glow from the street lights.

Through the gray afternoon lighted windows began to make a patchwork pattern, bright orange oblongs on dull

red brick. In one house four women — the mountainous hats seemed to indicate that they belonged in the high-ceilinged limousines — were playing bridge. In the next house two children stood on their heads on the window-seat. For a moment their feet and legs were black against the light behind them. Then they vanished into the dark end of the room.

Behind her Nicholas Joceleyn put down his fork with a small sigh of contentment.

Diana turned from the window.

‘May I take your tray?’ she asked softly.

She stood a little outside the circle of light. To the man in the bed she was only a figure in black and white with a faint glow of gold about the head.

‘Carol,’ he murmured, ‘Carol . . .’ and put his hand over his eyes for a moment. Then he dropped it again and said: ‘Yes, I’ve finished. Take the tray, please, and send Burwell to me.’

Diana bent over and picked up the tray. She heard him say ‘Carol!’ again. He spoke more clearly this time, but his voice still had a note of perplexity, and his dark brows were twisted anxiously as he looked up at her.

He said abruptly: ‘I feel . . . dizzy — my eyes . . . But the tea . . . real enough. And the eggs, you cooked them, didn’t you? Kitchenmaid . . . Hannah’s niece, aren’t you?’

‘No, Uncle Nicholas. I’m yours.’

Chapter 3

FAMILY AFFAIRS

IT HAS BEEN well said of Paul Revere Square that if Boston is the Hub of the Universe, the Square is the emblem on the hub cap. Residents quote this remark pretty often, but add deprecatingly: 'Of course it's all nonsense.' It is a good idea if you are a stranger — that is, anyone living outside the Square — not to agree with this polite hypocrisy.

People generally attribute the saying to Bertram Shatswell. Mrs. Shatswell has always encouraged her husband in his literary career. Nothing has been grudged — neither limp leather, nor deckle-edged paper, nor ribbon markers — to preserve Bertram Shatswell's writings for posterity.

They are not merely epigrams. There are poems too, mostly in couplets. Mr. Shatswell rediscovered the rhymed couplet long before Ogden Nash did and the Shatswell couplets rhyme correctly. There are few houses in the Square that are not equipped with the copy of the Ode that Mr. Shatswell wrote at the time of the Harvard Tercentenary. Its crimson cover with the white stamping makes a

cheerful spot on many a library table. Miss Lucinda Popham, the only resident of the Square who has actually read it, pronounces the Ode a very fine piece of work. Miss Popham speaks as an expert, although her own poems are mostly in manuscript. Perhaps her best-known one was written 'For the Transcript' about the tulips in the Public Garden. It is a double ballad beginning, 'Dame Clara Butt in satin rose,' and with the refrain, 'Where are the flow'rs of yesterday.' Miss Popham sent it out for a Christmas card two years ago. Hand-colored, of course. It is surprising how often a somewhat faded copy comes to the surface of the papers in Miss Popham's desk basket.

When anyone refers to her as Paul Revere Square's poet, Miss Popham always shakes her head with that languid motion that sets her long seed-pearl earrings swaying, trills her musical little laugh and says: 'Oh, but you forget Mr. Shatswell. *He* is our poet!'

It must be a little disappointing to Miss Popham that Mr. Shatswell never contradicts this statement.

It was an outsider, someone from Commonwealth Avenue, who said: 'As Boston is to other cities, so Paul Revere Square is to Boston — a little colder, a little shabbier, a little more complacent.'

This young man doubtless thought he was being cutting, but no one in the Square was annoyed. Complacency is unpleasant, but somehow no one minds being accused of it. At least no one who is complacent.

Anyway the Square has a right to a little self-satisfaction. Statistics show that there are more Phi Beta Kappa Keys in it than there are cocktail-shakers; more doctors' gowns with velvet-striped sleeves than there are negligees with marabout

trimming; more grand pianos than radios; more flannel petticoats than in any area of its size in the United States, including Alaska.

It is the only Square in Boston where you can find both a complete folio of Audubon's 'Birds of America' and a first edition of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover.'

No one in the Square owns a Pekinese.

No one in the Square has ever endorsed a cigarette; nor a complexion invigorator. (The idea that the countenances of the residents would not make merchandise sufficiently alluring is merely a symptom of jealousy in the hearts of outsiders.)

People sometimes talk as if all the houses in the Square were alike. This, of course, is nonsense and yet there are certain common traits. For instance, although everyone in the Square has a piano, the instruments are for the most part mute supporters of books, pieces of faded brocade, Japanese jars, and bowls into which small pieces of mahogany veneer, removed in dusting the furniture, and paper clips mysteriously find their way. All the houses have electric light, but most of the bulbs seem to exist for the purpose of being kept turned off. There are telephones, but the numbers are not in the book. Rugs must come from somewhere or other east of Suez, and there is always one bedroom where the floor is still covered with straw matting. Furnace heat has not generally penetrated to this room, and it has a bunch of peacock's feathers on the mantelpiece. Red or green cartridge paper is a favorite wall covering in the Square, but there is a considerable latitude in papers. A Japanese grass cloth, once green, now faded to a bilious tan, is always satisfactory. There is also quite a variety of vegetable life, but a Boston

fern, rather dry in spots, is eminently correct. There is usually a bust of Homer or Sophocles or someone's great-uncle on top of a bookcase.

Almost any visitor to the Square soon discovers that Princess Lobanov's house is an exception to all the rules. Peter's studio alone is a shock to the nerves of the Square, but it is generally hastily passed over with the same pained politeness accorded to insolvency and a smell of cabbage. It is a little difficult to ignore Peter's career because his mother refuses to let him carry it on in what she calls a hole-and-corner sort of way. She is not, she often says, the sort of mother who is jealous of her son's temperament. No one can say that she ever discouraged Peter from his painting.

She has opened up the top story of the house with a splendid north window so that he can have a good light and she is always buying gorgeous lengths of brocade for Peter to drape behind his sitters. There are half-finished portraits of almost everyone he knows leaning about the studio. Perhaps the tone of them, which suggests a ripe Roquefort cheese, has kept Peter from actually having a commission. He has taken to painting still life now. The picture that so annoyed his Uncle Nicholas — the one with the tray of Martinis, all of which contained olives, except the one with the human eye in it — was mentioned in *Time* last year. . . .

Old Ebenezer Jocene left Jocene & Company, Importers of Fine Teas, to his six children. Each was to have a sixth of the profits. To the sons was left the actual control of the business, with the stipulation that if any of them did not work in the Company, he must sell his share to the others.

All three sons were in the business at the time their father died: Nicholas was Treasurer of the Company; John was in China, buying tea; Stephen, the youngest, half-brother of the other five, was in the Accounting Department. By the time Ebenezer Jocene had been dead a year, John was exploring the Gobi and not finding whatever it is that people don't find there. Stephen was studying painting in Rome to the great benefit of the firm's ledgers. Sophia had married her Russian Prince and was already making those experiments with the hair and complexion that later became the cause of so many raised eyebrows in Paul Revere Square. Sophia had always been the ugly duckling of the family. The general opinion in the Square was that it would have been more respectable if she had not turned into a swan. Especially into such a sophisticated swan. Of course the Square's ideas about swans were largely derived from the swan boats in the Public Garden . . .

Nicholas Jocene bought out his two brothers. He had to cramp himself to do it. He even gave up buying porcelains. There was a pair of blue hawthorn jars that he still regretted. But John — pricked a little by conscience perhaps — had helped with the collection; found the Celadon bowls, the ox-blood vase, and at prices, as he wrote, that made it cheaper than stealing them. John had died of a fever in the Gobi without ever finding what he was looking for.

Old Ebenezer would not have liked John's marriage to an English actress and the divorce later would not in his eyes have improved matters, even though the reason for it was only that John and his wife could not agree on a convenient continent. Ebenezer would have thought it natural that they had both been willing that Nicholas should take their

boy and bring him up in Paul Revere Square. Where else would a Joceneyn be brought up?

Mrs. Joceneyn's return to Boston after she gave up the theater would have seemed natural to Ebenezer too. Why go anywhere else when you were there already? He would have disliked her calling herself Mrs. Rowe Joceneyn, but he would also have disapproved of his daughters' refusal to speak to her. Family quarrels were of course one of the pleasures of life, but they ought to be carried on in private.

As far as Stephen was concerned, his dabbling in painting, his elopement with Nicholas's fiancée would most certainly have meant disinheritance.

However, even if his family had chosen strange paths, Ebenezer Joceneyn had accomplished his main purpose. Joceneyn & Company flourished. In good years it poured out a golden flood. Even in poor ones its wide bronze doors under the pagoda canopy — with the elephants' heads and the dragons and the discreet touches of red lacquer and gold — sucked in green and white paper and blew it out again into the pockets of the Shatswells, the Keiths, and the Lobanovs.

So Nicholas Joceneyn, who kept the paper fluttering, was naturally of considerable interest to his sisters.

They generally did what he asked them to do. Bessie Shatswell did it affectionately and vaguely; Anna Keith with sour efficiency; Sophia Lobanov, gayly, casually, flippantly, according to her mood of the moment. She had developed a technique that enabled her to comply with the request and also evade it.

So when he called Princess Lobanov she drawled into the telephone in that English accent that she picked up in

Russia: 'No, Nicholas... I hadn't the faintest... Soddy, veddy soddy... No, not soggy, not the weather. Soddy. S-O-R-R-Y... But definitely, Nicholas... Quite... Really! ... Really!... Poor Stephen's daughter, and she looks like Carol... But certainly I remember. Although, of course, he was only our half-brother, and after the way he behaved to you... Why, certainly I won't mention it, dear Nicholas. One isn't more royalist than the King, is one? But I do think it's very generous... Absolutely. I won't mention it. I'm dumb. Completely. Of course I'm listening... *Two weeks!* She's been here two weeks! And you've been ill all that time! I hadn't the foggiest notion... I heard you had a cold, but I... Have you a nurse?... Only Burwell! I'd rather be nursed by a gorgon. Definitely... Ask her here? Why I'm aching to see her. Aching. I'm at home Saturday. Tell her to drop in. About five. I'll ask Bessie and Anna. She might as well get the full blow at once... Bill? Peter? Well I'll try, but you know how they are about stray relatives... Yes, I'm sure she's lovely... Carol was like a Romney and Ethel Barrymore. Tell her to forgive my not calling. My back, you know... Good-bye, dear Nicholas. Shall I send you some vodka? Serge always... You know best, of course. I have a wonderful Russian osteopath, with such temperament... Yes, of *course* you know best. Explain to — what's her name — Diana? ...'

Nicholas Jockeyne hung up without getting full details about Princess Lobanov's back. He hardly needed to be informed that the Princess's back prevented her doing whatever she did not want to do.

His own back ached and the blood beat hard in his ears. He did not want to call his other two sisters, but he knew

they would be offended if he did not. At least Anna would. Bessie was too lazy to be offended. For a moment he thought wearily that he would leave Sophia to spread the news. She could be trusted to do it.

He was quite right in his confidence in Sophia. She was already moving with a speed and determination praise-worthy in a sufferer from sacroiliac trouble.

Not being able to see into Sophia's room, merely into her mind, Nicholas Joceneyn picked up the telephone, called Mrs Keith, went through his formula again.

Would Anna see that their niece met the young people in the Square? He'd already spoken to Sophia.

'Attractive? Certainly she's attractive. She looks like — Carol,' said Nicholas Joceneyn, the blood thumping loudly in his ears.

Mrs. Keith's transports of rapture over the arrival of her dead half-brother's daughter were moderate. She was busy as Nicholas must know, with the Community Drive, but naturally she would call on Diana as soon as possible. And she would tell Bessie, who, as a matter of fact, was playing contract with her now. So if Nicholas would excuse her. He sounded very ill, she added encouragingly. And hoped he had a good tonic.

'I have,' said her brother, ringing off.

Nicholas Joceneyn's 'tonic' came into his room. She had a silver tray in her hands. On the tray was a tall glass with eggnog still frothing at the rim. There was a plate of small sponge cakes, tender, fragrant, and with a sugary crust like thin ice over soft snow.

They had known each other for a whole week now. The

figure in the black dress that looked as if it were meant for someone else was becoming as familiar as Burwell's carefully tailored pomposity.

To her uncle's grumbled 'Well, what have you been up to?' Diana said softly: 'Having fun in the kitchen. Hannah let me. She was nice. Daddy used to like these cakes, so I thought you might. I hope it was all right to use the eggs.'

'It was all right,' Nicholas assured her.

It would have been hard, he thought, to mind anything Diana did, especially now, with her cheeks very pink from standing over the stove and flour on the tip of her short nose that was so absurdly frivolous according to the Joceneyn standard for noses, and her soft velvety-brown, gold-flecked eyes looking down at you with that gaze, half-maternal, half-shy.

'Why didn't your father tell me he was hard up?' he asked crossly, and then, more gently: 'Oh, I suppose I know. I mean, of course I know. Never mind.'

'I do mind,' she said. 'And I know why. You'd always looked out for him and he had hurt you. So he was angry with you. Angry at first. Afterward it settled down into being stiff-necked and proud. But at the last he wasn't. I thought you'd like to know. That's why I came, partly.'

She moved across the room with her light step, drew the crimson curtains across the tall windows, then turned to the fireplace and, without fuss or clatter, made the sulking logs flicker into flame.

'What did he say? Tell me what Stephen said,' Nicholas Joceneyn asked.

She sat down where he could see her. She seemed to know what to do in a sick-room. Sophia, for instance, would have

stood where he would have had to crick his neck to look up at her, or leaned on the mantelpiece endangering the precious Ming yellow jars.

After a minute or two of silence Diana began to speak softly.

'It was the day before he died. I thought he was better. It was pneumonia. His fever had been high and he didn't always know me. He called me Carol — as you did the other day. I knew it was my mother he was thinking of. Then suddenly the fever was gone and he talked quietly, sensibly. Wrote that note to you, asking you to look after me. He could only just hold the pencil. He slept for a while. When he woke he began to talk about you.

"We were a selfish lot," he said, "but I was the only one that ever did anything really rotten. Nicholas was engaged to Carol. They were going to be married in a few weeks. I came home for the wedding. From Rome where I'd been studying. For my present to Nicholas I said I'd paint her portrait. Well, we didn't mean any harm. It just happened. We seemed to belong to each other. Those long hours..." I can remember every word, I think,' Diana said, 'but perhaps ——'

'Go on,' said her uncle quietly.

'He looked down at his hands and said, "These hands won't need washing with turpentine again. I'd like to see that picture. It must be in the old house somewhere. I'm glad I was a painter. I'd like to tell Nicholas that, but I can't write any more now. He gave me my chance. I wish I'd done better with it. But I've had some good days. Do you remember ——" Then he began talking about places he painted and how the light was on the snow in the early

morning and on a field of tall timothy in the summer wind. And he reminded me how when Kreuger and Toll went to smash and we didn't have any money, he painted Sam Wilbur's silo for him, not a picture. The silo. He said he thought it was some of his best work. He did odd jobs of painting, mostly inside, though, for the neighbors until he was ill.'

Nicholas Joceneyn muttered: 'Kreuger and Toll. So that was it. Was all his money in it?'

'About all he had left. He'd lost a lot in 1929. And before that he spent without counting much, I'm afraid. It was fun when we traveled all over the world, but I think we were happiest in the little red house. We had a bigger one at first, but he had a chance to sell it. It was mortgaged, so we didn't get much from it, but we lived on it for a while. "We'll eat the dining-room mantelpiece tonight," he'd say. Sometimes he'd trade pictures for milk and things. Every spring he used to get the job of varnishing the canoes up at the camp.'

She stopped, thinking her uncle had said something, but he had only made a sound that was either a cough or a suppressed groan, and she went on: 'We could always get rid of pictures of people's houses and of their cows. And the workhorses. Or the whole family out on the porch in their Sunday clothes. He used to get ten dollars apiece for them. In trade. Not cash, of course. He thought he ought to get twenty dollars for his big pictures like the one of the Chicken Pie Supper and one called Money Musk. It's a dance, you know. They're dancing it in the Grange Hall. I think it's good, but I suppose his pictures looked too much like what they were pictures of to be art. Anyway, I wouldn't sell them at the auction unless they brought twenty dollars and I — I didn't get a single bid.'

Her uncle made that noise again that was perhaps a cough.

'I wish you could have seen them. He always said you had the most artistic sense of anyone in the family. He told me about your Chinese things,' Diana said.

'He remembered them?'

'He remembered everything. But mostly what he did — running away the day before your wedding — that it was cowardly. He said they were right to marry each other. That their life together — short as it was — proved that. But that he ought to have told you. Almost the last thing he said was — that's what I wanted to tell you really — "He'd have understood. Nicholas was kind — always. I ought not to have been afraid of him."'

Nicholas Jocene lay quiet, looking at her. The cabinet of porcelain was like a tapestry of soft color behind her and the firelight made a bright glow back of her bright head. Her figure in the black dress was only a shadow, a little darker than the other shadows.

She got up and picked up the silver tray. It cut a cold white crescent out of the warm twilight. The silver glare dazzled his eyes.

'Yon rising moon that looks for us in vain,' he began half absently. His voice had lost its usual gruffness as he added, 'I understand. I always understood.'

Then with his old abruptness he said: 'We won't talk about it. It's hard for us both. Put that tray down. It shines in my eyes. Tell me about yourself. I don't know anything. Are you engaged?'

Diana laughed. It was a warm sound, a strange one in that house.

Burwell, who was listening conscientiously on the stairs,

shifted his weight and the tread creaked under his feet. Even his gratitude for the cooking of the eggs had not entirely lulled his suspicions. Diana had from Burwell's viewpoint several defects. She was a stranger. She was young. She was a woman. A woman, probably, with designs of some sort on his master. Burwell had spent a lifetime foiling feminine wiles for both himself and Mr. Jocene. It was only a proper caution — not curiosity, of course — that kept him on the draughty stairs in an attempt to see what the young woman might be up to.

He thought with a stifled sigh of relief: 'Even if she's not engaged, he can't marry her. She's his niece.'

He moved up a step in time to hear Diana say: 'Engaged! Why, Uncle Nicholas. I've hardly ever spoken to a young man. You have no idea how scarce they are in East Alcott. The competition is terrific. There are two eligible bachelors. One runs the sawmill and the other's the garageman, and I can tell you they're pretty careful never to speak to any woman under fifty-three or over twelve. Besides,' she added, 'even if Daddy hadn't greeted every youth for miles around as if he were ready to run a pitchfork into him, I was always too shy. I couldn't compete with the other girls.'

Her uncle growled: 'Nonsense. You'd knock the spots off everyone within the twelve-mile limit.'

Diana picked up the tray again.

'It's pretty nice of you to think so, but we might as well face facts. I've been an old maid since I was thirteen years old.'

'How old are you now?'

'Twenty-one.'

'Well you won't be when you are twenty-two,' said Nicholas Jocene firmly.

Chapter 4

PEACHBLOW

BURWELL CHANGED HIS POSTURE from that of private detective to the impressive pose of a butler coming upstairs for a tray. He had seen a film recently where a butler — all in the interest of right and justice, of course — had done the same thing. Burwell acquired a good many of his ideas from the flickers. He called them that because an English butler of his (illuminated celluloid) acquaintance thus referred to a great industry.

It must have been the same evening — allowing for the difference in time between Shanghai and Boston — that the gate of the house in the shabby street shut quietly behind Nicholas Joceneyn II. Nick — no one called him Nicholas — stopped for a moment behind it listening, but there were no footsteps outside. The sullen booming of the Japanese guns in the distance had become so familiar that he hardly noticed it except as a background for the commonplace noises of the evening — the clink of dishes from the kitchen, the barking of a dog somewhere down the road.

He had all day had the sense of being followed. The thick letter in his breast pocket — the letter with the money in it, the order for the guns, the General's scheme for getting them delivered — had seemed to make his feet drag. Well, he was free of it now. He had given it into the right hands. With its delivery the sense of quiet footsteps padding a little way behind had left him.

He went into the house, whistling softly and shifting the box with the vase in it to his good hand. Because of that sense of being followed and the feeling that his left hand must be free, he had been carrying the box clumsily, uncomfortably, under his damaged right arm. The doctor had removed the splints that day. The arm was still stiff and lame. He was supposed to use it now, but he could see, as he put the box down, that he would not be much use in a plane for a while.

He went into the dark, bare bedroom, lay down on the sagging mattress of the iron bed, and tried to forget his aching arm. He had been lucky to escape from the crash with no worse injury, but it was annoying not being able to fly. He wanted to be back at something he did well. Not — he thought with some satisfaction — that he'd done so badly about the letter. Only it wasn't his line — undercover work. Buying tea was more familiar ground. He'd liked it really. You couldn't do very badly at it, if you were a Jocene. The path was smoothed for you in so many ways, by century-old friendships, by a tradition of honorable dealing, by — a minor point, but not to be laughed at — the Jocene gift of an accurate palate for the subtle flavor of Lapsang Souchong.

But since there was at present no tea good enough for

Jocelyn & Company to be had, he might as well do something for China. Only his uncle, who had always hated his flying — hated it not because it was dangerous, but because it was hostile to Jocelyn & Company — would not see it that way.

‘I can’t help it,’ he thought. ‘There are things more important than tea-chests.’

The word tea-chest made his thought swing to the bundle on the table. The vase, well wadded with crushed newspaper, was packed into a tea-box. Ah Wong must find a stronger one, big enough to hold the tea-box, and manage somehow to send this peace offering to Uncle Nicholas.

He called Ah Wong, who took the tea-chest. There was a box in the storeroom that would fit it, he said. The noise of nails being yanked out and pounded flat was louder than the sound of the guns across the river. Nick lay still and watched the sky lighten before the rumble and roar drifted across.

Ah Wong stopped hammering; began to slam heavy kettles around. He had a flexible and discontinuous pattern of work. He would mop half the floor, wash half the dishes, nail half a box, yet ultimately the floor would be clean, and the peachblow vase would be packed.

It was a lucky accident, Nick thought, getting the peachblow.

It was because of that mistaken sense of being followed that he had dodged into the little shop. There was nothing on display to attract him particularly — a bronze or two, a broken set of ivory chessmen, a stained coat of yellow silk, heavily embroidered. Looking at it he had smiled at the recollection of the young Chinese at Harvard who had invited him to tea in his room. The walls were hung with

B.V.D.'s and gaily striped shirts. There was a pair of pajamas — red with a neat pattern of orange-and-green airplanes — thrown carelessly over the radio. Suspenders garnished the mantelpiece. Plaid suspenders.

'To make you feel at home,' their host had explained kindly. 'Just as it makes me feel in American houses to find the piano so very attractively covered with Chinese underwear ...'

He was fighting somewhere now, this friendly, courteous, and amusing young man. His brilliant eyes and sensitive fingers would have told whether the peachblow vase was genuine. Nick had to trust only to his instinctive liking for it; to a feeling it gave him of repose and peace that freed him for the moment from the sense of following footsteps.

The old shopkeeper had slid a thin, yellow hand into the jar and had brought out a slip of paper which he spread out before Nick's eyes.

Someone had written on it in English.

'Peachblow is the lover's color. He who sees peachblow in the dawn sees happiness.'

It was cheap, the old man said, naming a price.

Nick, still scowling over the scribbled words, shook his head.

'To be angry with one you love is a fishbone in the throat,' the shopkeeper suggested helpfully. 'The jar will be peace offering. I make the price smaller.'

He spoke excellent English, rather like someone on the 'March of Time' program pretending to be Chinese.

'But this,' Nick told him, dropping the paper back into the jar, 'is a matter of friendship merely.'

He turned toward the door.

'Love is a pearl, grasp it and it slips through the fingers. Friendship is a lump of jade; carve it as you will, it is yours forever.' The old man brought this sentiment out hurriedly and added, 'I make the price only one half. So perhaps the peachblow is safe — not broken by guns.'

'You're not leaving the city?' Nick asked. 'Many people are moving away.'

'Where to go? Where to carry my goods? No, I am too old. I stay where I have been so long. Perhaps bombs fall somewhere else. Who knows? Take the peachblow, Sir.'

Nick took it without more bargaining. The back door of the shop opened on another street. To reach it Nick walked through a spicy-smelling twilight between half-seen shapes of bronze and porcelain and hurried down a dark, curving road. He had no fear of seeming to hurry now; no need to stroll casually looking in the windows. The following footsteps no longer padded behind him, faster and slower with his own. In the crowds of people trudging hopelessly, helplessly with their bags and bundles, one more man with a box under his arm would not be noticed. The box, awkward as it was for his lame arm, somehow made him seem natural, at ease. It was normal in that weird twilight, stained with flashes of glaring light, to be moving somewhere, carrying something.

He had been tired when he got back to his house: the bare, impersonal place that he never thought of as home. His weariness was not chiefly physical, although his arm ached more than usual. It was the moving crowds, the stooped shoulders, the patient, bewildered faces that discouraged and depressed him. He had done what he could, what any one man could, against the force that was driving

these people from their homes, but he had accomplished nothing, nothing at all, he told himself. It did not matter about the money that he had poured into the Chinese cause. The fact that he had been only a short time ago a rich young man and was now a poor one — who had no business to buy peachblow vases even at bargain prices — troubled him very little.

Money had never meant much to him except that if you were generous, it was convenient to be rich. He was glad that he had given that money to his mother to set up her business. There was nothing generous about turning it over to her. His father ought to have left it to her, divorced or not. Giving it to her was only decent. He liked her, although he knew her so little. He couldn't see why his father couldn't get on with her, except that his father had not had a great deal of practice in getting on with anyone.

It was when he was tired that these thoughts began to drift through Nick's mind. The usual one followed: that he had been lucky that his uncle had taken him in when he was a boy. That led him back to the peachblow vase. He hoped his uncle would like it. He had no peachblow that Nick remembered.

He shut his eyes. Ah Wong had stopped washing dishes now and was pounding again. The rhythm of the hammer strokes and the sound of the guns became only a distant drumming.

Nick fell into a doze that deepened into sleep. He did not hear the door move behind him, nor the footsteps padding up to his chair.

The gag was in his mouth before he could make a sound. Even the twisting agony as he felt his arm break again left

him silent. There were three of them. One held his feet and one his arms while the other went through his pockets. This one had cold hands. He used them swiftly. It was like lying still while a yellow snake squirmed over you.

All the time Ah Wong went on hammering and singing.

Nick thought: 'They'll find I haven't got it and go,' then, 'but they mustn't. They'll know then I've delivered it.'

He tried to kick the man off his feet. If he could kick him against the table, there would be a crash and Ah Wong would come.

The dirty yellow fingers sunk themselves into his windpipe. Then, as Nick still struggled and kicked, instead of the clutch at his throat came the terrible searing pain in his eyes.

Perhaps the pain saved his life. It gave him strength to kick the man into the table. Ah Wong came. One of the last things Nick remembered seeing was Ah Wong with the hammer in his hand.

Chapter 5

CONFERENCE

ON THE AFTERNOON that Nicholas Joceneyn telephoned to his sisters a pleasant example of family affection was given by the speed with which Princess Lobanov got herself out of her Fortuny tea-gown and into her black suit.

In the tea-gown the Princess aroused thoughts of the Renaissance. Its subtle blending of terra-cotta and bronze and dulled gold made her pallor, the narrow oval of her face, her pale, greenish eyes and long Joceneyn nose with the twist in the middle, the improvements she had made in her Joceneyn eyebrows, the new shade of copper she was trying on her hair all into something that fitted nicely into the fifteenth century. Yet in the black suit with its short fur-trimmed skirt — the Princess had enviable legs — its furred military tunic with the frogged opening, the astrakhan hat set slantwise on her coppery hair, she had a rakishly Cossack look. In this costume she moved with a swagger. Her slender feet seemed to carry her along to some swinging tune of gaily broken rhythm and succulent minor chords. As she

hurried through the pelting, sleety rain along Paul Revere Square and swung up the steps of Mrs. Keith's house, she looked gay and reckless. That is, if you happened to be behind her. No one saw her face.

Whatever expression it had worn in the gray twilight of the Square had, on her entrance to Mrs. Keith's drawing-room, been subdued to an ironical languor. A monocle would not have been out of place in her left eye. She kept one carefully arched eyebrow higher than the other and the vividly slashed scarlet line of her lips was drawn slightly to one side. This arrangement of features had the advantage of deepening the dimple in her left cheek. Furthermore, it gave her a slightly quizzical look that put the person on whom it was turned on the defensive. People who talked to the Princess often found themselves explaining things about which she had asked them nothing at all.

Her sisters were still at the card-table when she was shown in. The Princess leaned against the white marble mantelpiece and smoked a cigarette in a long holder of green jade. A large emerald glowed on her hand and there was a discreet sparkle of diamonds at her wrist. She had a praiseworthy ability to stand still. She never fidgeted, nor played with bric-à-brac, nor fluttered the leaves of books. Except for the slight motion of the hand that held the cigarette holder and the faintly moving haze of blue smoke, she might have been drawn in black against the white marble grapes and the severe elegance of Mrs. Keith's winter bouquets in the alabaster jars.

Mrs. Keith did not approve of extravagance in flowers.

'When you can go right out on a dump and pick something with real crispness and line,' she often said, 'why should anyone bother with great mushy splotches of color?'

In spite of Princess Lobanov's admirable repose, the card-players did not find her a restful companion. One of them overbid her hand in a way quite foreign to her methodical style of play. The rubber came to a sudden end with dark looks interchanged between the lady with the purple bow on the black hat and her sister with the black bow on the purple hat. Neither of them seemed to enjoy her tea, although it was Jocene & Company's Gold Seal of fragrant memory. Most of the bread and butter — Mrs. Keith considered cakes vulgar and was rich enough to act on that theory — was left untouched. In an astonishingly brief time the Jocene sisters were left alone.

Even then the Princess did not speak. She whistled a bar or two of some irritatingly Russian air, tossed half a cigarette into the chaste display of pleated paper and white birch logs in Mrs. Keith's memorial fireplace, and attacked the plate of bread and butter with the absent-mindedness of one whose glandular balance is perfect. Mrs. Shatswell, who spent much of a not very mathematical intelligence in counting calories, watched her sister with an expression as near annoyance as her natural placidity permitted.

She declined the remaining fragment of bread on the ground that she had to remember her weight. This should not have been any especial effort for Mrs. Shatswell, but if there had been a shaggy coconut cake, it would have been impossible. Nature has two favorite pleasantries. One is to blow people up so that they are caricatures of themselves. The other is to dry them out till they rattle if shaken. Neither trick is done with mirrors. Mrs. Shatswell had once been the beauty of the three Jocene sisters, but that was seventy-five pounds ago.

Mrs. Keith had not even the happy recollection of having been a beauty before undergoing the shriveling process. She was an erect, parchment-faced woman with stiff gray hair and sharp shoulder blades. Her Joceleyn nose had an inquisitive twist. Her gray-green eyes peered sharply from under drooping crêpe-paper lids. Strangely enough there was a certain likeness between her and the Princess, not that either would have admitted it.

If Bessie Shatswell had ever had a Joceleyn nose, it had vanished. No one feature stood out in the scrubbed and polished pinkness of her face. What was left of her hair had the whiteness that comes to hair once flaxen. In fact, in its owner's eyes it was still flaxen and its tendency to appear in stray wisps was placidly accounted for by the owner on the ground that it was naturally curly.

It was Mrs. Keith who finally broke the silence.

'I suppose Nicholas telephoned you too,' she said grimly.

'I heard he hadn't been well,' the Princess said vaguely.

It is always pleasant to see a harmonious family group, especially when even the youngest member has half a century of experience of the others. Not that Princess Lobanov admitted to a complete half-century. Lately she had shown a tendency to forget the Spanish War. Her sisters accepted this absent-mindedness, her extravagance, and her picturesque treatment of dull facts, just as the Princess and Mrs. Shatswell accepted Mrs. Keith's carefulness about string, electricity, and firewood. That is, they ignored it with strangers and enjoyed a good talk about it with each other. Mrs. Keith and the Princess naturally had often commented to each other on dear Bessie's laziness in letting herself be dominated by a conceited, greedy, bad-tempered

little half-pint of Mayflower vinegar — the expressions are Princess Lobanov's on one of her less English days — like Bertram Shatswell.

The Princess and Mrs. Keith agreed that Bessie spoiled her two boys; Mrs. Keith and Mrs. Shatswell agreed that Sophia spoiled Peter Lobanov; but even the Princess and Mrs. Shatswell did not pretend that Mrs. Keith had spoiled her son Ebenezer. E. Joceneyn Keith, as he was beginning to sign himself, was a model young man. His mother admitted it, yes, and even his aunts.

Not finding anything to say against Eben, as the family still called him, his relatives generally laid a few wreaths on the grave of his father, Clarence Keith, who had certainly been a very tiresome person up to the time he stepped in front of an automobile in 1924.

'Anna caught all this string-saving from him,' was the Princess's opinion. 'The Joceneyns were never like that. Bold men, all. Risk takers.'

The Princess had not expected her remark to be repeated to Mrs. Keith. The Princess was an optimist who thought her listener more discreet than herself. However, the coolness caused by the rapid passage of this comment to Mrs. Keith's ears had had time to heal. All was harmonious among the Joceneyn sisters that wintry afternoon.

It took little time and few words for them to agree that the entertaining of their niece had better be done over the week-end while Bill Shatswell could be depended on to be away mooning over his horses and Eben Keith had gone skiing. As for Peter Lobanov, he would be tramping around his studio smeared with paint. He never came to his mother's parties unless she dragged him by the hair. Definitely. And

in the mean time they had better take turns sitting with dear Nicholas, since with only Burwell to look after him he must be having some dull days.

‘But he has Diana there now,’ said Mrs. Shatswell. Both her sisters were patient with Bessie. Neither had shown any annoyance when she had suggested that they could give a dinner party soon for Diana when all the boys were at home. Bessie had an impractical streak. Quixotic, really. If Bessie got it into her head that anyone was being treated unkindly, she became absolutely mulish. The way with Bessie was to agree with her and rely on her laziness.

The Princess threw another cigarette into the fireplace. This one ignited the paper frill, somewhat to Mrs. Keith’s annoyance. However, she controlled it until her Cossack relative had swung her crimson-lined black cape over her military raiment and whistled her way out into the Square.

Then and only then did Mrs. Keith pick up the silver tea-kettle and drench the burning paper. She was just in time. In another second the birch logs would have caught.

Chapter 6

DRESS MAKES A DIFFERENCE

IT PROVED IMPOSSIBLE for Nicholas Joceleyn's sisters to carry out their pious intentions about sitting with him during his convalescence. When Mrs. Shatswell called, she was informed by Burwell that Mr. Joceleyn had gone to his office. Mrs. Shatswell, whose mind worked best when it contained only one idea, turned away without asking any questions. She had promised Sophia and Anna to go and sit with Nicholas. She had even brought a large purple bag with mustard-colored flowers on it containing her petit point, but as Nicholas had recovered, she could go home and work there much more comfortably. She was making a fire screen for Bill. It had a hunting scene on it and it was hard enough work to get the horses shaded correctly even at home without anyone distracting her with conversation.

In her anxiety to get back to her screen, Mrs. Shatswell forgot to ask for her niece. If she had, she would have learned that Diana had gone out with her uncle, but even that alarming piece of intelligence would probably not have

worried Mrs. Shatswell. She combined dull browns and greens and spots of scarlet, feeling placidly glad that Nicholas was better. In the tense mental state induced by getting the largest bay horse so that he looked like a horse at all, she had little energy left to think about what might happen if Nicholas were influenced by 'that girl.' As a plotter Mrs. Shatswell was hopeless.

Mrs. Keith was more efficient. On being told by Burwell that Mr. Joceneyn had gone out, she asked crisply for Miss Joceneyn.

Miss Joceneyn had gone out too, Burwell said in his frostiest manner. He started to shut the door. Mrs. Keith did not exactly put her foot in it, but she stopped its closing by saying: 'I'm surprised you let him be so imprudent, Burwell.'

Burwell said coldly: 'We consulted the doctor, Madam.' 'What did he say?'

'His conversation was with Mr. Joceneyn, Madam. After Doctor Lomond called, Mr. Joceneyn informed me that he would dress and go out.'

Burwell might have amplified this statement. Doctor Lomond, who was a gentleman of loud and violent speech, had said in tones easily audible in the front hall that if Nicholas wanted to be a — qualified — nincompoop, no one could stop him. So if he was going to worry about that — decorated — tea business, he might as well get up and see to it. Though why in the name of — this and that and the other — Nicholas couldn't get some of his — profusely ornamented — nephews to do something about it was pretty — heavily embroidered — queer! Suppose they couldn't get some special brand of dried-up twigs. 'Let 'em drink champagne,' con-

cluded Doctor Lomond helpfully, putting away his stethoscope and jamming his thick form into a frowzy coonskin coat.

'Your pump's running better,' he added from the door, 'but don't go losing your temper or I won't answer for it. What you need is to keep calm,' he roared from the stairs. And had rushed past Burwell and slammed the door behind him before Burwell could get to it.

Mrs. Keith still kept her place on the steps.

'Letting that draught in on me,' Burwell thought bitterly behind his weary mask of old-world courtesy.

'When will he be in?' Mrs. Keith asked.

'I really couldn't say, Madam. He and Miss Jocene are lunching at the Ritz.'

Mrs. Keith's heels clicked hard down the front steps.

Burwell shut out the offensive stream of fresh air.

'Guess that jarred the old weasel's spinal cord,' Burwell remarked to himself.

'What did you say, Mr. Burwell?' inquired a voice from above.

Burwell hastily became the perfect butler.

'I said, Minna, that you'd better give Mr. Jocene's room a thorough cleaning while opportunity affords,' he said untruthfully and imperturbably. 'But don't go dusting our porcelains because Miss Diana's already done it and is to have charge from now on.'

'You and your "Miss Diana!"' Minna observed.

She intended scorn of a soft attitude toward the intruder, but she could not keep a certain note of tolerance out of her voice. Since the day of the fried eggs, the prejudice against the interloper had faded rapidly. The meals had suffered a

sea-change into something rich and strange. It happened so suddenly that one evening that week Diana, trusting in the customary tepidness of the soup, had actually burned her tongue. Chops were wreathed in parsley where only chips of mutton had lurked before. Pastry began to appear in tender flakes instead of in one cohesive sheet like well-seasoned leather. Peas ceased to be suitable for ammunition. String beans lost their close resemblance to string — old gray and brown string cooked with lots of water. String beans and baked potatoes are, after all, the test of cookery — a test that Hannah had no difficulty in passing.

There is no real mystery about the strange alteration in the cooking at Nicholas Jocene's. Like all artists, Hannah needed inspiration. Without it she retired to her bedroom and left the kitchen in the hands of the kitchenmaid. After eating one of Diana's sponge cakes Hannah decided that here was a foe-woman worthy of her eggbeater. She grumbled, of course, but she cooked.

Minna, panting after the exertion of climbing eight steps, said: 'It seems our loving sisters are taking quite an interest in us all of a sudden.' She paused, polished what may very possibly have been a fingerprint from the stair rail, and added: 'We'll be having her Pretty Nearly Royal Highness next!'

'The Princess has asked Miss Diana to tea on Saturday,' Burwell confided, but in a reproving tone that absolved him in his own mind from the charge of gossip.

'Oh, Mr. Burwell, and her without a thing fit to wear! It's throwing her to the lions, that's what it is.'

'She looks better in her old black dress than these debs that've got their pictures on the paper so far this season,'

asserted Burwell, that earnest student of the society columns.

‘That’s the man of it,’ panted Minna, attending to a speck of dust four steps farther up. ‘It’s not how she looks. It’s how she feels.’

Burwell said belligerently: ‘It’s Mrs. Keith’s fourth winter on that brown coat to my certain knowledge.’

‘That’s different,’ puffed Minna wisely. ‘She’s so rich she can wear what she likes. People like Miss Diana and me has got to look our best.’

Minna need not have worried. At that very moment in a gray and chromium shop — with a name as well as a decorative scheme that he heartily resented — Nicholas Jocene was paying for Diana’s new clothes. He had chosen the shop because he knew from Princess Lobanov’s endearing habit of going abroad suddenly and leaving him to settle her bills — ‘Hate to bother you, dear Nicholas, before this month’s income is due, but I must take the *Normandie*. Definitely’ — that the Princess bought things there, when she was not buying things in New York or Paris, and that it was very expensive.

He was handing over a thick sheaf of new ten- and twenty-dollar bills. The elegant gentleman with the marcelled hair accepted them in a shocked manner.

He would be glad to arrange credit, he said, fingering the bills with the tips of fingers like cold macaroni, as if there were something disreputable about a cash transaction.

Diana and her uncle were quite unconscious that the elegant gentleman was deciding that these customers weren’t ‘quite out of the top drawer.’ It was a phrase he had heard from a New York buyer who had met someone who had a cousin who knew Noel Coward. . . .

Nicholas Joceneyn was thinking: 'There, that's done and there won't be any bills for Anna to nose over — in case . . .'

Diana was hardly thinking at all. She got into the big car that her uncle had hired — he never had owned a car; it was cheaper to hire, he said — and surveyed the pile of silver and violet-striped boxes at her feet as if they might melt away.

She was wearing the fawn-colored dress that had nothing at all on it, but was draped as beautifully as if it were on the Winged Victory.

'I hate black. Except velvet,' Nicholas had said. 'Don't believe your father would have wanted you to wear it.'

Diana admitted that Stephen had hated mourning.

It was only, she explained, that her neighbor, Mrs. Wilbur, had given her the two black dresses and the coat. Made them over for her out of her own clothes. There hadn't been any money for clothes lately. And Bertha Wilbur had said that anyone looked all right in black as long as she wore plenty of clean white collars and cuffs . . .

There was a black velvet dress in the bottom box. It was for evening and had sleeves of white fur. There was a tweed suit that looked like violets seen through a morning mist and that smelled like smoke and burned toast. There was the white dress that seemed to be made out of a little moonlight and a few dewdrops and the coat of scarlet velvet to wear over it. He would have bought her a fur coat, but she knew they were expensive, so she wouldn't let him. She'd like a cloth coat, she said. So now she had one and had it on: softest camel's-hair with a beaver collar. No one had mentioned anything so vulgar as prices.

She could hardly remember what was in all the boxes.

Oh, yes — sweaters and skirts to match them, and stockings, more stockings than she had ever seen before in one box. Her uncle had pushed a hundred dollars into her hand and told her to go and make hay among the lingerie while he rested.

She couldn't make herself spend it all. She and her father would have lived for half a year on it, she told him gravely.

'Keep the change then,' he said gruffly. 'You may think of something we've forgotten.'

Really he had forgotten nothing. There were the hats, ridiculous hats, designed, he said, apparently by imbeciles for morons. But then that was always so, he supposed. Only when he saw Diana in the brown velvet one, he recanted and said they were designed by gnomes for elves or hamadryads or something.

The fitter was less fantastic.

'You wear it well, dearie,' she said. 'I'm Mrs. Plumber. Don't forget me. Just think of the kitchen sink.'

Mrs. Plumber was a pleasant oasis in the gray and chromium desert of elegance. She was a woman of power. The marcelled young man deferred to her. The Wellesley graduates in the Brooks sweaters and discreetly small strings of pearls and hand-loomed tweeds jumped when she spoke. The hat genius and the shoe expert and the artist in bags and the coat specialist all crowded into the fitting-room and made approving noises.

Mrs. Plumber turned Diana around twice, pinched up a sixteenth of an inch of material and said, 'One loose tack and it will be perfect.'

Everything was perfect to Diana. She went to lunch at

the Ritz in the fawn dress and the camel's-hair coat and the hamadryad's hat. She carried the suède bag that matched her shoes. It had twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents in it. And a mirror that showed her a stylish stranger.

It was hard for Diana to believe any of it.

Just before they went to lunch, Mr. Joceleyn had stopped at a small shop, asking Diana to wait for him a minute. It was a long minute during which she tried to pretend that she was in the habit of sitting in limousines. She noticed the faces in the other limousines that passed her and tried to look as bored. It was not much of a success.

When her uncle came out, he had a cherry-colored box tooled with gold in his hand.

'I've been looking over the young ladies and it seems they'd catch cold if they didn't have something like this around their necks. So I got this for you, Carol. Change it if you don't like it.'

It was a string of small pearls, shining, faintly flushed with rose.

'Not very big, but none of this Japanese stuff. Sneaking up on innocent oysters and irritating them. They'd irritate more than oysters,' he growled.

He went on grumbling about the Japanese until Diana had recovered enough from the tears that somehow insisted on trickling down her nose to thank him. It was only partly his calling her Carol that made her cry. It was his voice, eager under the gruffness; his look, weary, yet happy, like that of a small boy coming home from the circus.

She mopped up the tears with one of her new handkerchiefs and kissed him suddenly, greatly to the surprise of two members of the Colonial Dames and much to the pleas-

ure of a policeman, the doorman at the Ritz, and Mr. Joceleyn.

‘No one ever kissed me in a car before,’ he announced, straightening his hat. ‘I like it. Makes me feel modern.’

‘I never kissed anyone in a car before,’ said Diana.

Chapter 7

TOTAL ECLIPSE

THAT DAY ALWAYS stood out afterward. After lunch her uncle took her to Joceleyn & Company and sent her over the big building with a beautiful young man with a brown-and-pink face and a brown tweed suit with flecks of orange and green in it, and a small gold football on his watchchain. He looked as if he ought to be outdoors, but he seemed quite happy inside showing her how tea was blended and packed into the tin boxes and how the smallest and tenderest leaves went into the ones with the gold seal. Diana was charmed by the cleverness of the machines that tied tea into little bags, but the young man — his name was Griffin — told her that she had better not mention them to her uncle.

‘He thinks it’s immoral for people to use tea-bags. Selling them boiled cotton, he calls it. The mouse in the tea-cup is another of his — er — pet names for a tea-bag. Eben Keith had a fine young fight to get them put in,’ said Mr. Griffin.

‘I thought perhaps I’d see Mr. Keith.’

‘He’d have been the lucky stiff to show you around, be-

cause he's in charge of the machines. But there's a very superior brand of snow in Tuckerman's Ravine.'

'There's snow on Mount Mansfield too,' Diana said, and then they stopped talking about tea and talked about skiing. Mr. Griffin was trying a new foundation wax. Quickest drying yet. You could put on four coats in no time at all.

'How about going out and breaking a leg or two with me? I can get off tomorrow morning,' he said, but Diana said she had no ski things with her.

She smiled as she said it and the dimple stirred in her cheek. She happened to be thinking of the disreputable mackinaw that she had left in East Alcott for moth bait. She was quite unprepared for the effect produced by the dimple.

Within five minutes Mr. Griffin had thought up six different ways of equipping her for every emergency in a skier's life. They could borrow his sister's things. Or his other sister's. Or his cousin's. They could rent skis. Or steal them. Just wait till a banana wagon came along and help themselves. It would be a Good Act. Possibly saving the neck of some innocent child.

'I'll — *I'll lend you my parka,*' said the young man in a burst of generosity. Sir Walter Raleigh he felt like. Practically.

A lovely brunette in a blue satin blouse with crystal buttons said severely, 'Mr. Griffin,' and the beautiful young man spun around.

'You have to sign those letters before the office closes,' said the lovely brunette coldly without removing her gum. 'And Mr. Joceneyn wants to see Miss Joceneyn.'

Mr. Griffin said it was no wonder . . .

There was a thin gray man in Nicholas Joceneyn's office. He looked stiff among the teakwood and the paintings on silk and the Khang Hsi jars. He was folding papers. The papers crackled under his thin fingers. He snapped an elastic around the bundle, dropped it into a green bag, and jerked the string tight.

Nicholas Joceneyn said, 'Diana, this is Mr. Clifton,' and the man looked at her sharply out of narrow gray eyes, and gave his head a short jerk.

He said, 'D'you do, 's Joceneyn,' crisply and his mouth stretched a little like a rubber band and snapped back again.

Diana decided it was a smile, so she smiled too and Mr. Clifton jerked his head toward Nicholas Joceneyn and snapped: 'I understand, Nicholas. Completely.'

There was a Buddha, carved of wood and gilded, in the corner behind Nicholas Joceneyn's desk. Both the Buddha and Nicholas Joceneyn seemed to be watching Mr. Clifton with a half smile on their lips. They both seemed to have plenty of time, but Mr. Clifton jerked on his gray coat, and yanked on his gray gloves, and slapped on his gray hat like — as Bertha Wilbur would say — 'a cat lickin' up chain lightnin'.'

'I'll have them ready for you to sign Monday. Be here — or at your house — at two o'clock.'

'At my house, thank you, Follingsby,' Mr. Joceneyn said gently as Mr. Clifton jerked at his hatbrim, snatched up the bulging green bag, and hurried out with his knee joints cracking.

Mr. Joceneyn and the Buddha continued to look benevolent and half amused. The Buddha looked tireless. Nicholas Joceneyn was pale and there was weariness in his deep-set gray eyes.

He looked better after his secretary brought tea in thin rice-patterned cups. He took a long breath of the pungent steam, murmured, 'Ah — the Caravan, that's right. Thank you,' and sipped it absently. He sent for a second cup while Diana was still waiting for hers to cool. He did not speak, and she sat looking about the office, enjoying the subtle curves of wood and porcelain, the texture of the plum-colored rug, the crisp delicacy of painted silk, and the dark luster of bronze. Except for the telephone on the desk everything in the room was Chinese. Even her uncle seemed to have something Chinese about him this afternoon. His placidity as he sat with the thin cup warming his cold fingers gave him for the moment the air of some ancient scholar. At any moment he might break the silence with some old piece of wisdom: 'It is written — true words are not fine; fine words are not true,' or, 'This humble and unworthy person regrets to say that a lie has no legs, but the wind can blow it faster than the steeds of truth can gallop after it.' -

Of course he wouldn't say that. And anyway it wasn't Chinese at all; it was only another of Bertha Wilbur's East Alcott sayings put into fancy language. She thought again of Mr. Griffin and his ski-mania. It was her new clothes, of course, that made him want to take her skiing. If he could have seen her in that mackinaw!...

Her uncle was still silent. Diana got up and moved around the room, studying the tiny figures on the painted silk. There was, she discovered, something else in the room besides Uncle Nicholas and the telephone that wasn't Chinese. It was lying on a table among some pieces of carved jade: a shabby photograph frame of red leather. The picture in it had been torn out of a newspaper. He was looking at some-

thing outside the picture with an expression of quiet amusement. The photographer had caught him evidently when he wasn't looking. There was a relaxed casualness about his whole figure — the rumpled dark hair, the unshaven chin, the soldier's coat fastened crookedly over one folded arm. One sleeve hung empty and his strong throat rose out of an unbuttoned collar.

It was not the sight of the injured arm that made Diana draw in her breath sharply.

Her uncle heard the sound — it was scarcely a gasp — and said, 'That's my nephew. I happened to come across it in the drawer when I was looking for my — for some papers. I'll put it back.'

He put out his hand, but she held the picture for a moment studying it. Then she handed it back and Nicholas Jockey shoved the frame face down into a drawer.

'He's training Chinese aviators,' he said, 'when he ought to be buying tea. Broke his arm bailing out, as he calls it, on some dime-a-dozen plane when its wing dropped off, or it exploded, or the motor fell out, or whatever it is happens to these things he flies in. They make 'em,' Nicholas Jockey said crossly, 'out of Model T Fords and old umbrellas and feather dusters. He's the most infernal nuisance.'

He might be, Diana thought, an infernal nuisance and fall off feather dusters, but her uncle had said 'my nephew' without remembering apparently that he had four others. But that did not seem strange to her because she had seen this one.

Her uncle went back to his writing. There was time in that silence, broken only by small noises of pen and paper, to think about the day of the eclipse.

How old was she? Thirteen perhaps. Her hair still hung in heavy braids over her shoulders, but she was as tall as she was ever going to be. Her faded blue dungarees hardly reached her thin ankles. The dark cuffs of the striped Rowe blouse were unfastened and hung nearer to her sharp elbows than to her wrists.

Afterward she looked in the glass. It was the first time she had ever cared how she looked. She might have twisted her hair around her head, she had thought. That would have made her seem older. But still there would have been the blackberry stains on her old blouse, the shrunken dungarees, the freckles across her short nose, her skinny arms, the smoked glasses.

Of course everyone wore smoked glasses that day. His own goggles were smoked. She took off her own for a minute. She wished he would push his up on his helmet, but he never did.

The shadow had already bitten into the sun so that it looked like a broken saucer, when they heard the plane. She and her father were watching for it on the flat-topped hill above the house.

Her Uncle John had come the week before and looked over the field. It was a possible landing-place, he said. If it were cloudy farther east, he might come. Nick would fly the plane, he said. And the field wasn't bad. Really not bad at all. They'd landed in much worse places in China.

The field had been mowed and the clover was coming up through the stubble. Already now there was something strange in the quality of the light that seemed to suck the color out of the vivid green and purple of the clover.

'Do you think Uncle John will come?' she asked her father.

Stephen Joceneyn was sitting on the stone wall at the top of the field. He was eating the blackberries she had picked for him.

'I hardly think so,' he said. 'More likely he'll go farther east. He only said "possibly," you know. Still it seems clear here. There's quite a cloudbank east of us.'

He picked up his notebook and began to write in it, putting down those things that looked like algebra and that were really his way of recording color values.

Then she heard the plane. First it was only like wind or rain a long way off. Then it was like a drill for blasting, but still off in the clouds. Then it shot out of them, circled with the noise of a sawmill when the saw strikes a knot. The roaring ceased. It bumped across the rough ground and stopped only a hundred yards away.

The big man who got out was her Uncle John, and the thin one must be his son, Nick. Her uncle was like her father only heavier, older, with a white mustache. He hardly looked at her. His attention was all on his camera, his compass, his watch, and on a thing like a small telescope that he kept holding up toward the light. He was the way her father was when he was painting — not indifferent exactly, but living in another world.

He threw his helmet on the ground, but Nick kept his on. He was like a Roman soldier in her Latin book, Diana thought. He moved quickly, quietly, as he helped to set up the camera. He had to hurry because the light was fading so fast, but he had time to smile at Diana and to give her a chocolate bar that he pulled out of his pocket.

'We're going to do it, Nick,' John Joceneyn said to his son. 'I believe we've escaped the clouds. It's thick over Newport

Won't be long now. If that cloud to the south doesn't move too fast. Listen to the birds.'

In the woods to the left the crows were quarreling about whether it was time to go to bed. The thrushes were already singing their evening chorus. A charm of goldfinches left the thistles in the pasture over the wall and settled in an old apple tree with nervous whistlings. Even a hummingbird stopped pretending it was a miniature airplane and sat quietly in a chokecherry tree among the other rubies and emeralds.

'Cows going home,' Stephen Joceneyn said.

They could hear the slow, broken beat of a bell, the swish of evergreens along the cowpath, and the pounding hoofs.

'I'm going up, sir,' Nick Joceneyn said to his father, and then to Diana: 'Want to come, sailor? Join the air force? See our solar system?'

She could say only, 'Oh — oh, Daddy,' but her father said: 'Sorry, Nick. No insult, but I'm a back number that loves the ground for my favorite relatives. We'll see all right, Diana.'

'If that cloud ——' John Joceneyn groaned.

'Come up with me, Father. You'll be sure of seeing it,' Nick said. He was in the plane, leaning out.

'We've been into that, Nick. Too much vibration. No chance at all of my picture. Here I've at least something solid to stand on. It's a color plate I want,' he said to Stephen. 'Long exposure.'

Then the mechanic spun the propeller and in a moment the plane was only a droning above the clouds.

The crows were quiet now.

'It's coming,' John Joceneyn said. 'The shadow bands . . .'

He bent over the hood of his camera.

They could see the dark bands quiver across the dull green of the field. Then that cloud to the south — it was only a small one — drifted across the sun.

‘So that’s that,’ said her uncle quietly.

They sat in the gathering twilight, feeling, rather than seeing, the black shadow rush over them. Diana shivered at the cold wind that followed it. Her father picked up his cardigan sweater and wrapped it around her. The minute of darkness seemed hours. The tinkle of the cowbell had stopped. She remembered the cows standing, pale shapes, in the barnyard. Even the pulsing beat of the crickets stopped briefly. The silence seemed as actual a thing as the dark.

Then suddenly it was broken. A cock crowed defiantly and sharply. From the woods the crows seemed to explode in screaming and cawing. The cloud drifted away showing the thread of fire along the edge of the blackened sun. From the east came the distant voice of the plane, and before long Nick Jocelyn zoomed down out of the clouds again.

‘Yes, I saw it,’ was all he had to say about the eclipse.

He spoke gently, vaguely, as if he were still a long way off in the sky with the pearly light of the corona flashing around him, but he was quick and efficient with the camera. Too quick, Diana thought.

From the time the plane first came to the moment when it rose for the second time with the clover blossoms bending before the hurricane of its wings was hardly an hour.

‘I’ll come back, sailor, and take you up some day. Kidnap you when the stern parent isn’t looking,’ Nick had said.

But he never came. Sometimes a plane would go over East Alcott. It never circled and dropped in the green field. After a while she had stopped listening for it . . .

Chapter 8

EXCLUSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

NICHOLAS JOCELEYN did not go to Princess Lobanov's tea on Saturday. He was going to work with Clifton that afternoon, he told Diana. He would have his tea at the office. Perhaps his dinner too. It might be late in the evening before he had finished. Besides, teas were not in his line. The trouble with teas was the tea. Lately it was often coffee, a beverage Mr. Joceleyn regarded with suspicion.

'And Sophia puts her tea in a samovar,' he said darkly. 'I'd rather drink cuttlefish ink.'

'Do you think you ought to work so late? Doctor Lomond ——'

'Lomond's an idiot. Besides, I'll rest all he likes, after Monday.'

At twenty minutes before five on Saturday Diana started for Princess Lobanov's alone. She had dressed too early and she spent ten minutes looking out into the Square and feeling chilly. This would not have been a cold day in East Alcott, but there was a raw breeze off the river that sent chilly

draughts through the cracks around the windows. The wind came out of tattered inky-gray clouds that hung close to the gray river. There was a streak of dull yellow where the sun had set, and the lights from the bridges spangled the twilight with pale gold. They were pretty, but somehow they were less heartening than the white glow of Bertha Wilbur's Aladdin lamp shining across the bleak, snow-covered orchard.

Bertha's lamp never smoked. Diana remembered how Bertha had described one of the less eligible members of East Alcott society as 'the sort that would turn an Aladdin right up and go away and leave it.'

Diana wished she could tell Bertha how scared she was. If she could tell someone, she thought, it would be easier to start across the Square. As there was no one to tell, except Burwell, who would certainly disapprove of such faint-heartedness, she consoled herself with one of Bertha's aphorisms: 'Don't tell your troubles to anyone. Half the world doesn't give a damn and the other half's damned glad of it.'

With this somewhat cold comfort Diana set out for her Aunt Sophia's white-columned doorway. She walked slowly, the confidence given by her new clothes dwindling with each step.

She thought, shivering in the bitter wind: 'Women don't like other women to look stylish. They might like me better in my old clothes.'

She hesitated; almost turned back, but shrugged off the idea. Burwell had let her out with a glance very like approval. Suppose he met her sneaking out in her East Alcott clothes! It would be worse than meeting a whole zoo full of aunts.

She wished she could see some signs of a party at Number

28. The house was austere quiet. Its Venetian blinds looked blankly at intruders, the silver doorknob gleamed frostily against the cold expanse of white door. The Noah's Ark trees guarded it stiffly. The wrought-iron railings looked hard and uncompromising.

'If I could only see someone going in,' Diana thought, walking more and more slowly.

It was just then that Peter Lobanov blew around the corner. His hat blew around it first and he followed it running lightly in spite of an easel under one arm, a picture under the other, and sundry squashy-looking boxes clasped in front of him.

The top one fell off as he reached Diana, who caught it neatly and then picked the hat out of the gutter. It had not suffered. It was that kind of hat.

Prince Peter Lobanov's first words to his cousin were: 'Great snakes, don't drop the hors d'oeuvres!'

'I don't drop hors d'oeuvres,' Diana said severely. 'Would you like your hat?'

'Jam it on my head,' Peter said, thrusting it forward.

He had a lot of fluffy, dusty-colored hair sticking up all over his head and a pale face with large, greenish-yellow eyes set wide apart. His face started to be square, but gave it up at his cheek bones and sloped sharply to a pointed chin. His mouth seemed to have rather too many teeth in it, but they were white and he had a nice smile.

He looked, Diana decided, rather like a kitten: an innocent, mischievous, and absent-minded kitten.

She put the hat on his head and stacked the box on the others that he was still holding against his chest.

'Now if you would just add to your favors by ringing that bell ——'

He jerked his head toward Number 28, not at the austere front door, but at a dark green one below and to the right marked 'Service Entrance.' Diana rang the bell. Then she ran quickly up the three steps and even more quickly up the other steps above them that led to the white door.

For a moment Peter Lobanov stood with his mouth open looking up at her. Then his dejected hat, his wrinkled trench coat, the easel and the picture of a cow eating a corsage of gardenias, and the five squashy boxes all disappeared.

The big door above swung open.

Diana's voice felt very small, but the red-headed giant in pale blue with silver buttons heard it. He led her down a mile or two of black-and-white marble. She tried to step in the squares, not on the lines. Her new heels clicked loudly in her ears.

The giant took away her new coat and hid it with the air of a conspirator concealing a family skeleton.

Then he said, 'Miss Diana Joceneyn,' at a high silver door and left her to her fate.

There are various ways by which a hostess can make a guest feel uncomfortable. Princess Lobanov was mistress of several methods of different degrees of subtlety, but she preferred the simplest: so she wore her hat.

She also employed the dictator technique of standing at the end of a long room and letting the stranger do the walking. Diana made her way across a desert of silvery carpet. She was conscious of the frozen beauty of the room — its chairs of silver-and-white leather, its gleams of crystal and onyx, its icily translucent hangings, and of the mirrors that seemed to make the frosty room frostier. There was a fire in

a cavern of black onyx and silver, but it burned with cold blue-and-green flames. Above it was a picture of an endless forest of blue trees with snow on them.

For the first half-mile or so Diana's knees almost betrayed her. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, she was angry. When Diana was angry the shell pink of her cheeks deepened and her gold-flecked brown eyes darkened. Her golden head in the hamadryad's hat lost its pose that meant sweetness and eagerness to please. Without any marked change of carriage it became as haughty and indifferent as the figurehead of a clipper ship.

The three figures dark against the crisp striping of the Venetian blinds ceased to seem menacing to Diana. They were only a thin old woman with a pompadour holding up a funny hat, a stout lady comfortably upholstered in red velvet — an engagingly cheerful note in the Snow Queen's Winter Palace — and a tall woman whose tailored tweeds and coppery hair looked too young for her face.

The Princess found herself moving forward several steps. This had not been part of her plan, but perhaps she was unsettled by the ideas that were clashing behind her neatly lifted face. They were as follows: 'Worse than I thought. She's pretty! Lucky I told Peter to go in the Service door and not to come to tea. It would never do — or would it? If Nicholas leaves her money — But he mustn't. We must get her away before... The clothes — saw that model at Maurice's... Schiaparelli... Nicholas must have... no fool like an old fool... wish I'd worn my Fortuny... a wolf in Schiaparelli's clothing!' concluded the Princess, noting the phrase as one that might be useful sometime in the right company.

She stepped forward enclosing Diana's hand in an icy, bony clasp.

Mrs. Keith's greeting was if anything farther below zero, but Mrs. Shatswell actually lumbered off her Egyptian throne and beamed upon her niece.

Diana smiled, and her eyes turned golden again.

She said shyly: 'It's Aunt Bessie, isn't it?'

Mrs. Shatswell said heartily: 'Of course it is and I'm so sorry Bill couldn't come.'

She meant it, too, poor simple soul. Bessie Shatswell never had any head for arithmetic. Mrs. Keith, a more intellectual type, had already decided that it was a good thing Eben was safe in Tuckerman's Ravine. Skiing was a dangerous sport, and Eben, cautious about most things, had responded rather tartly to her suggestion that he should sit down on the steep places. Still it did not present the pitfalls of a week-end in Paul Revere Square.

After Mrs. Shatswell's speech she naturally felt that no more effort was needed. Silence grew longer and longer like an overripe icicle.

At last the silver door opened and the pale blue giant announced: 'Mrs. Follingsby Clifton. Miss Barrows.'

One of them wore a black hat with a purple bow. The other wore a purple hat with a black velvet bow. Both wore beaded strips of black velvet where their chins should have stopped. The Princess remembered that this call had been threatened at Mrs. Shatswell's bridge table, but she could not remember whether the hats were on the same heads. It was distinctly unsportsmanlike if the owners had changed hats: that is, it would have been if the Princess had spent any mental effort in distinguishing Mrs. Clifton from Miss

Barrows. She did not, but calmly attached the wrong name to each hat and presented Diana to the occupants.

Diana knew that people had a quaint preference for their own names. Detecting under the hatbrims expressions not altogether of sweetness and light, she promptly reversed the names and addressed the lady under the purple bow as Mrs. Clifton.

The effect was electric. Something very like a smile illuminated Mrs. Clifton's long reddish face. For a moment she did not look at all like a cigarstore Indian. Diana, encouraged by this animation, ventured another remark. The first one had been about the weather.

'I think I met your husband yesterday, Mrs. Clifton. He was in my uncle's office. With some papers,' she said.

There was a queer silence. Five pairs of eyes were sharply focused on Diana. The Princess, who had been sprinkling some blue-green crystals on the burning logs, turned sharply and, after a brief pause, asked: 'Did he have on a top hat?'

Princess Lobanov's green eyes made this question — certainly a sufficiently silly one — sound faintly menacing.

Diana felt herself flushing, which was also silly since she had not thrust any hats into the conversation — but she answered politely: 'No, Aunt Sophia. He had a soft gray one.'

The tension in the room relaxed. Miss Barrows began to talk about the New Deal and everyone was happy in common gloom.

'It means the wiping-out of Our Class,' Princess Lobanov said.

'Mr. Maxwell. Mr. Howard Smith. Mr. Dusenbury,' announced the red-headed giant.

The Princess forgot about Our Class. She allowed Mr. Maxwell, who was small and fluffy, and sandy-haired, Mr. Howard Smith, who pouted, and Mr. Dusenbury, who had a jovial pink face like a good baby's, to kiss her hand — a maneuver which they did very well, for sophomores — and said sweetly: 'Diana dear, take Miss Follingsby and Mrs. Harrow — I mean Darrow, stupid of me — downstairs to the dining-room and see that they have a good tea. And how about you, Bessie? Tea? Are you ready for tea, Anna? Diana will take care of you, I know. Lovely of you, Diana. Like having a daughter. How I've always longed for one! Can you manage the stairs, Anna? Or would you just like to sit quietly here and let someone bring you a cup? You don't mind the stairs? Really, Anna, you're *marvelous*! They bother me terribly — my back, you know . . .'

The Princess had been in a warm mood when she decorated the dining-room. It had walls of beaten copper. The fire was allowed to burn in natural crude tones of red and yellow. The samovar gleamed brightly and there were forests of bronze and gold chrysanthemums.

The only light was from the fire and from thick yellow candles in heavy brass holders. Smoke from cigarettes made a haze that eddied around the candles. Diana found it hard to see. The frosty glare of the drawing-room was still in her eyes. She had an impression of dark shapes moving through a warm twilight, of pleasant smells — smoke and hot mushrooms and tea and chrysanthemums — of the clink of silver on china, all happily blended.

There was a thin, brown-haired girl behind the samovar. The candlelight gleamed on her spectacles and sharp nose.

Mrs. Shatswell said vaguely, 'Polly, this is your cousin

Diana,' and fell to work methodically on a plate of canapés like glistening jewels. It would take, Diana thought, about three minutes to construct each one. Mrs. Shatswell ate four in less than a minute without counting the calories. She did not hurry, but took time to select those with the gray caviar.

Miss Barrows said rather fretfully: 'There is some currant jelly in this tart that tastes like fish.'

'Red caviar,' said Mrs. Shatswell briefly, beginning on her fifth canapé.

'I don't believe there is such a thing,' Miss Barrows remarked.

Mrs. Shatswell did not argue the point. She turned her attention to the burnt-almond cakes.

The girl behind the samovar grinned cheerfully and said to Diana: 'So you're the country cousin. It's like red caviar: I don't believe in it. Something fishy somewhere. I'm Polly Shatswell, by the way. Aunt Bessie always expects people to know by instinct. Incidentally, I'm not related to you — worse luck. I'm her husband's niece. But she always forgets it — the darling. Let down the back hair now and tell me why you are masquerading as an innocent farm maiden. Something's been put over on the Square, it seems.'

Diana had taken an instant liking to this brusque girl.

She said: 'Uncle Nicholas bought me some new clothes, but I'm still a country cousin. I keep expecting that hayseed will shake off me into the tea. And, by the way, I'm supposed to get tea for people, Aunt Sophia said.'

'There's no use trying to sell any,' Polly remarked. 'Aunt Bessie and Mrs. Keith would as soon drink vodka as tea from a samovar. The Barrows girls — Mrs. Clifton and her sister, you know — always take coffee and they're getting it over

there. The younger set likes our pale dry sherry, splendid full-bodied and a marvelous bouquet. Have a dash of liquid walnut juice yourself? It's full of tannic acid, which is fine for burns, I hear, so if you boil yourself inside you have the treatment right there. No? Well, try the hors d'oeuvres. Aunt Bessie left some. I could do with half a dozen myself. Thanks. Good, aren't they? Made over at the Russian Eagle. Aunt Sophia orders them out of some horrid virtue — patriotism or charity or something. Deluxe result, though.'

Polly Shatswell had a funny voice, slightly nasal but friendly and cheerful. Her sharp nose was funny, too, but then so are many noses. Most of the handsome ones are on statues. She had a wide mouth that turned up at the corners with an impish twist, and patient hazel eyes like the eyes of an Irish terrier. It was a pity that her eyes had to be fenced off from the world by heavy chromium-rimmed spectacles. To anyone who took the trouble to look behind the glasses Polly's eyes showed a wide range of expression, all the way from a patient gravity to a bright, careless twinkle.

The twinkle was in evidence as Miss Shatswell inquired: 'And what is our favorite Princess keeping on ice upstairs? Harvard expects every man to do his duty. Who are the heroes today?'

'Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Howard Smith, and Mr. Dusenbury,' Diana reported accurately.

Polly Shatswell ate something with an anchovy comfortably curled up on it, and murmured: 'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. I bet she didn't introduce them — oh, I forgot. Here I sit eating her food and not drinking her tea. The cat in women has nine lives. Never mind.'

Diana did not reveal the fact that her Aunt Sophia had

shoved her downstairs as if Diana were a contagious disease that might be caught by Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Howard Smith and Mr. Dusenbury in their cradles. She had been annoyed by being swept out with such speed and efficiency. Now she began to see that it was funny.

'It's a compliment really,' announced Polly, interpreting Diana's silence and smile with easy accuracy. 'She'd have introduced 'em to me. And half a dozen more in pencil-striped suits and little gold whoosises on their watchchains and ties like Christmas candy and ——'

A voice behind Diana said: 'Can't I get you something, Madam, some of our special hors d'oeuvres, for instance?'

She turned and found herself looking at the man whose hat she had picked out of the gutter. He had brushed his hair, but it still stuck up here and there in cowlicks. He had on a Russian blouse of blue linen bordered with an intricate pattern of red embroidery and a pair of baggy trousers that would have been a sad shock to Mr. Dusenbury.

Polly Shatswell observed: 'That's not a moujik, Diana. It's just Peter Lobanov. Peter, this is my cousin — almost — Diana Joceneyn.'

'*My* cousin,' corrected Peter. 'I saw her first. I said to myself, I must paint her. Could I but have, I murmured to myself, that little head of hers, painted against a background of pure gold, such as the early Tuscan art prefers, I said. Or did a guy called Browning say that? Anyway I dropped out of poetry. Lobanov, I said to myself, look, Lobanov! Her ears are put on right. No woman in Boston, nor yet in Newton Upper Falls, has such ears. I must paint her. Showing the left ear. The lovelier of the two. A shell. From some far Tyrian shore.'

He walked around Diana gravely and gazed out of his green kitten's-eyes at her left ear.

'Don't mind him,' suggested Polly. 'He's crazy, but quite harmless.'

Peter gave a sudden pleasant laugh.

'Now, I remember. This was the unattractive little cousin from East Alcott, Vermont. I needn't be bored to come down to tea. There's a moral in this, ladies. If I hadn't been late because I was selfishly dragging home one of the greatest little masterpieces that ever came from Old Maestro Lobanov's dustpan and brush, I wouldn't have seen her. Vice is rewarded, and virtue foiled again. So there, Princess Lobanov!'

'Your mother never saw Diana till this afternoon,' Polly remarked.

'She's been telling fortunes with tea-leaves then. It's the gypsy in her,' Peter said briskly. 'Polly, what are we going to do about this? I hear the tread of ten thousand or so men of Harvard on the stairs. Dangerous guys — these Harvard men. I don't think an innocent girl from the country ought to meet them. Do you?'

Polly got up, saying she supposed the back stairs still worked. Diana found herself being pushed through a door of copper and brass and up the dim twists and turns of what Peter described as 'a priceless period stairway in the original mahoganized match board.'

When Princess Lobanov came into her dining-room, attended not only by Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Howard Smith, and Mr. Dusenbury, but by two other youths equally beautifully steamed and pressed, she found it gratifyingly clear of competitors. Even Mrs. Shatswell and Mrs. Clifton had eaten

their way out. The Princess's motherly intuition did not tell her that upstairs in Peter's workshop Diana was saying firmly: 'I will *not* be painted looking like a mouldy slice of toast.'

'I'll have to change my style then,' said Peter cheerfully. 'We'll begin Monday.'

Polly Shatswell, who had been looking through the big window at the broken lights in the windy river, said over her shoulder: 'It's quite a tribute, Diana. When he did that mossgrown effect of me he said he wouldn't change his style if Rembrandt dropped in and offered to hold the brush.'

'That was a long time ago,' said Peter hastily.

'So it was,' Polly agreed. 'A year at least.'

Her voice still had its funny twang, but Diana thought she heard in it somewhere a new note. It was lost, however, in Peter's repetition: 'We'll begin Monday. No, Tuesday. Monday I have to be out of town. Tuesday. Maestro Lobanov has spoken. He is never wrong.'

Maestro Lobanov, as it turned out, was for once mistaken.

They asked her — Peter asked her and Polly seconded him — to go to the movies, to go and drink beer at the Hofbrau, to climb Bunker Hill Monument by moonlight. To the objection that there was no moon, Peter said he would have one turned on. To all these suggestions Diana replied that she was going to spend the evening with her uncle.

They had to let her go. The last guests were kissing the Princess's hand. She was wearing her old-world smile: the Mona Lisa one that she generally kept to go with her Fortuny tea-gown. Peter saw it stiffen to the look of a sphinx that has heard bad news as he followed Diana into the

drawing-room. It was a look that made him think he had better see the girls home.

Peter and Diana saw Polly home first. She lived with the Bertram Shatswells, Diana discovered. It wasn't dinner-time yet, so Polly and Peter saw Diana home and then Diana and Peter saw Polly home again. After which bit of courtesy they all three went and took a look at the river and the misty-pink glow from the neon signs. Peter's hair began to stand on end in the wind and he shivered. So this time Diana actually went home, duly escorted, of course, and Peter and Polly walked over to the Shatswells' again.

At the foot of the Shatswells' steps Polly asked in her abrupt way: 'Going out of town, Monday, doesn't mean anything, Peter?' And Peter said in a weary tone very different from the voice Diana had heard: 'Not much chance, I'm afraid. There'll be dozens ahead of me.'

They were in the vestibule by this time, out of sight of the Square — if there had been anyone in it. There was no one, as a matter of fact, except a cynical-looking black cat with a white patch over one eye. The cat paid no attention to the long pause in the conversation; neither did she notice the change in Peter's voice as he said, 'I'll stick to it, though, till I get something. Don't worry,' or that Polly's had a queer catch in it as she said, 'I won't, Peter. Good luck.'

All the cat listened for, being a cat of principles and enlightened self-interest, was the click of the latch. Hearing it she bounded between the legs of the only Prince in Paul Revere Square and went in at the door like a bolt of black lightning.

Across the Square Diana was putting on the velvet dress with the fur sleeves. Her uncle had telephoned he would be

late, but he would like to see it, she thought, when he came home.

She sat up till nearly midnight, but at last she went to bed, so he did not see it after all.

Chapter 9

SILK HAT

NICHOLAS JOCELEYN SPENT that Monday morning trying to teach Diana about Chinese porcelain. Toward noon he said: 'There are stupider girls than you are in the world.'

Polly, who had dropped in to lunch as casually as if she had always known Diana, said it was a high compliment. The idea that perhaps Polly liked her made Diana shy and excited.

Nicholas Joceneyn seemed to understand how she felt.

'I'm going to rest,' he said. 'You girls can both talk at once. Don't waste a minute,' he added with his eyes gleaming under his shaggy brows.

They took his advice. Polly, who had always, since her parents died, lived with her Uncle Bertram's family, gave Diana what she called a worm's-eye view of life in the Square.

It made the life of a worm seem pretty stimulating, Diana said. She wanted to hear more about it, but Polly had to go back to her job. She worked in a publishing office.

'That must be wonderful,' Diana said. 'You must meet so many interesting people.'

'Authors, you mean?' Polly asked, jamming on her hat without a glance in the direction of the mirror.

Diana did mean authors.

'If you kept a livery stable you'd know horses,' Polly said morosely. 'Authors and horses both look best when they're far away. Did you go to the Book Fair?'

'No, but I did wish ——'

'Authors should be read and not heard,' Polly announced, softening this heresy with her impish smile. She was almost pretty when she smiled, showing a dimple and white teeth. Diana hated to have her go, but after buttoning the third button of her coat into the second buttonhole and putting on two similar gloves, one only slightly darker and larger than the other, Polly departed.

The car that Nicholas Joceneyn had hired to take them into the country appeared soon after lunch. It had a chauffeur who looked more like a bishop than most bishops do. Nicholas Joceneyn had put Diana into the car and was getting in himself when another purred into the Square.

Mr. Follingsby Clifton got out of it. He had his green bag in his hand. Balanced on his head, well above his ears, was a top hat. Either the hat had not been designed for Mr. Clifton or his head had grown during the hat's lifetime. He snatched it off hastily, showing a red crease on his pale forehead.

Diana suddenly remembered Princess Lobanov's asking tensely if Mr. Clifton were wearing a top hat. Mr. Joceneyn, however, did not appear to see anything sinister in the gleaming silk cylinder that Mr. Clifton put back so precariously on his stiff gray hair.

Nicholas Joceneyn said: 'Oh, Follingsby, I'd given you up. It's good of you to bring it. It would have kept till to-morrow.'

'Said Monday, didn't you?' Mr. Clifton nipped off the words sharply. 'Morning, 'S Joceneyn. Won't keep you a minute.'

Two clerks from Mr. Clifton's office got out of the car. They did not have silk hats, but they walked as much as possible like the owner of that dignified symbol.

Mr. Joceneyn said: 'Need three, don't we — here, Murphy, you'll do. Come in a minute, please,' Nicholas Joceneyn said to the chauffeur-bishop.

Mr. Clifton rescued the hat from a probable roll in the gutter, gave it a sour look, and put it on again at a new and equally rakish angle. Then he marched up the steps beside Nicholas Joceneyn, swinging the green bag with the precision of a pendulum. The chauffeur lumbered after them. The benevolent placidity of his red face showed no surprise at his employer's request. Even the fat bulges above his collar radiated kindly unconcern.

Nicholas Joceneyn felt relaxed and happy in the warmth of Diana's presence. Yet twice during the drive that twisting, burning pain had flashed down his left arm and had left him gasping for his next breath. He managed to conceal the gasp both times. It tired him to talk. The crisp air made him sleepy. He leaned back in his corner and shut his eyes for a moment. It lengthened into minutes, five, perhaps, while Diana watched him anxiously. His profile against the dark cloth was like a wax medallion. It might almost, with the fine arch of the Joceneyn nose and the firm lines of the chin, have been a portrait of Washington. But portraits of Wash-

ington always had a sturdy look and about Nicholas Joiceyln there was a sort of translucency.

He woke as suddenly as he had dozed off. The effect of his eyes opening was like a light turned on in a dark room.

'You must forgive me,' he said with his brilliant smile, 'I worked late last night. But I can play for a while now. Where would you like to go — Bermuda? California? I've heard of a place in Arizona where they say the air's like drinking diamonds set in gold. Sounds indigestible, but it must be good because I heard that some people from Boston there spoke to each other without being introduced. Just a traveler's tale probably . . . China — no. I suppose we can't go there. I'd like to see Nick. But he's on his way home already. He cabled. We might meet him in Hawaii. But you choose.'

He stopped with a laugh because it was pleasant to have Diana's face to laugh at. Her eyes opened, showing the gold flecks in the brown. Her mouth opened enough to set the dimple going. Nicholas Joiceyln thought that her ridiculously short nose quivered a little at the tip. Perhaps it did.

All she said was: 'Oh, Uncle Nicholas. Hawaii!' but he seemed to find it an adequate remark.

'I'll get the tickets,' he said, 'in the morning.'

Naturally Mr. Follingsby Clifton had not gone up the steps of the Joiceyln house wearing a silk hat without attracting the attention of Paul Revere Square. It was afternoon, however, before the news reached Mrs. Keith. Miss Lucinda Popham had been busy writing a poem (the muse was in the saddle, as Miss Popham put it) and had not telephoned very promptly. Mrs. Keith, however, with her

Board of Lady Managers efficiency, lost no time in calling Princess Lobanov's number.

The Princess was sitting in front of her mirror in a mood of Southern languor. Peter was stretched out on the chaise longue observing his mother's work as an exterior decorator through half-closed eyes. She had just refused his request to lend him enough money to buy a partnership in a little tea-room and antique shop on the Worcester Turnpike. It was, as she said, a ridiculous idea. She pointed out, entirely without rancor, that whenever Peter thought he had found a job, it was always a question of putting money into some very shaky business. Not that she was annoyed with him, she said generously, but the thing for him to do was to stick to his painting.

She was wearing, in preparation for possible invasion, black velvet and pearls and a mantilla with a red camellia caught in it. Her slurred and decorated drawl disappeared as she answered the telephone.

'Follingsby Clifton? Silk hat? I will see Nicholas at once,' she said crisply. 'Tactful? Really, Anna. I think you can trust me. I will tell you sometime what the Czar said about my tact.'

'You have,' said Mrs. Keith and hung up.

'What's all this hocus-pocus about silk hats?' Peter asked, yawning. 'This is the third time I've heard it.'

The Princess, who had just thrown the camellia into the fireplace and was busy extricating herself from the mantilla, said impatiently: 'Heard it twice and didn't tell me! And you waste your time trying to buy a silly little gifte shoppe! It only means your uncle's been changing his will, that's all.'

'What makes you think so?'

The pupils of Peter's green eyes contracted and his light, lazy figure stiffened into attention as sharply as a dozing cat grows tense at a dog barking in the next yard. His voice, however, remained casual.

The Princess, who had gone into her dressing-room where she was tearing off the velvet dress, answered lightly: 'Aren't you just the merest trifle feeble-minded, darling? Surely you know by this time that every respectable firm of Boston lawyers keeps a top hat in the office so that whoever goes to draw a will can wear it. It's a tradition — like those frowzy balls of dead fish at Sunday breakfast. Nothing less than an important will would put a tall hat on the head of Follingsby Clifton. He probably had on brown shoes,' added the Princess with a shudder.

She appeared in her street clothes. Peter was standing near her dressing-table playing with a lipstick in a gold case.

'So a silk hat is a sign for the vultures to gather,' he said slowly. 'I don't quite see what you expect to accomplish at this point. It's not likely he'd change it again.'

'He may not have signed it yet. Give me that, please. I need it.'

Peter handed over the lipstick and picked up her bag instead, opening and shutting its various compartments with his thin fingers. Princess Lobanov, arranging her face for outdoor work at the big triple mirror, went on: 'I may easily persuade him. Nicholas has a great sense of responsibility for his sisters. I shall appeal to that. And at least I can find out if that girl is making a fool of him. My bag, please.'

'You don't need it,' Peter said quietly. 'You're not going over there to spoil the only fun the old boy's had this last thirty years. Besides, you're not even sure he's left her any-

thing. And what if he has! He's got plenty. You're not going.'

'Just how do you expect to stop me? . . . Don't be . . . ridiculous . . . let go of my wrist. You're . . . hurting me.'

'As soon as you say you're not going,' Peter said softly.

Princess Lobanov laughed sharply.

'Darling Peter. How strong you are! Wonderful what you can do with one hand to a woman twice your age . . . But of course I won't go. In fact,' added the Princess, 'I think it will suit my plans better *not* to go.'

Peter let go her wrist.

'What do you mean by that?'

'Why, whatever you think I mean, no doubt, darling boy. How lucky my dress has long sleeves. The bruise won't show at all. I do wish you'd told me sooner, Peter. I wouldn't have changed.'

'Told you what?'

'Why, that you didn't want me to see your uncle. About your — er — rustic chivalry. How clever of you to see that she can be civilized,' the Princess said, shutting the door of her dressing-room.

Peter lay down on the chaise longue again. There was a dull ache between his eyes and the blood beat loud in his ears.

He did not hear the other door of the dressing-room open into the hall, nor his mother's light step on the thick stair carpet. It was not, in fact, until Princess Lobanov was being escorted by Burwell to Nicholas Joceneyn's study that Peter realized she had gone.

Mr. Joceneyn had just come in, Burwell said, looking peevish as he showed the Princess into the dingy, untidy

little room where Ming jars shouldered their way out of piles of papers. Pipes and pipe-cleaners and tin tobacco boxes competed with first editions for space on the tabletop. The sofa sagged comfortably under the owner's long frame.

He was reading 'The Newcomes' for the eleventh time. The smoke from his pipe puffed up through the shade of the lighted lamp near him in a blue pillar. Through it the portrait of Diana's mother in rose and silver brocade looked down at him. Stephen Jocene had painted her with a straightforward simplicity: the pompadour of brown-gold hair, the luster of brocade, the creamy softness of old lace, the velvety crimson of the roses in her hands were accurately and carefully done, although the hands themselves were unfinished. The expression was a little stiff, a little conscious — the look of a magazine cover of the period. There was no stir of a dimple like Diana's in the neatly tinted cheek, no sparkle of mischief in the eyes. They were gray-blue serious eyes, not Diana's gold-flecked brown ones. She looked down at the littered room with the grave indifference of a girl on a candy box for the candy under the lid.

Princess Lobanov paid the portrait the tribute of a glance and a shrug of the shoulders: a movement so slight that it might have been taken for an adjustment of the silver foxes that had — doubtless gladly — laid down their lives to make the Princess beautiful. The shrug was a tribute. Ordinarily she would not have noticed the portrait at all. Now she felt impatience. First with Nicholas for his sentiment in keeping in his room the unfinished picture. It was evident, surely, that when Stephen dropped his brush, leaving the hands unfinished, it wasn't because Carol looked the way he had painted her — so smug and innocent. Obviously he wouldn't

have taken the picture since he had the original, but Nicholas ought not to have wanted it either. He ought to have had more pride. The impatience was also for Carol Willard herself whose daughter was now threatening Princess Lobanov's security. What a fool she had been, the stiff quiet girl with the pompadour! To have had Nicholas and let him go. To have had Stephen and let him waste his money and talent. To have died and left her burdens to others.

All this was in the shrug, but Nicholas Joceneyn, getting up wearily from his place on the sofa, laying down pipe and book, did not see it.

It was, his sister said, horrid of her to break into his afternoon tryst with Thackeray. But where else to catch him? He was like a rainbow. When you put your finger on him, he wasn't there. And speaking of rainbows and pots of gold and things, the Princess did want to consult him — here she inserted flattering words concerning his judgment — about her investments. Which were not pots of gold. Definitely.

'To tell you the truth, Nicholas,' she added frankly, 'I was an awful idiot to sell you my share in the Company. I'm not getting the income I used to.'

'I suppose you mean you've overdrawn your account again,' Nicholas Joceneyn said, sitting down at his desk and opening a drawer. 'I can let you have five hundred, Sophia, but that's all. I'm going on a cruise and I'll need some cash myself.'

'It's too *generous* of you, Nicholas,' murmured the Princess. 'I can't tell you how grateful I am.'

Her brother shoved aside Chapman's 'Homer' and 'The Corpse in the Orchid Bathtub' and began to write in a large checkbook.

'How lucky to be going on a cruise! The Red gods call us Jockeyns and we must go, I always say. Hard to resist, isn't it?'

'Not particularly,' Nicholas said, pressing a blotter down over his neat black signature. 'I've resisted it for thirty years.'

'Of course you have. Always sacrificing yourself for the rest of us!' the Princess exclaimed penitently.

She took the check, folded it neatly, and put it into her bag. Suddenly her face brightened and she said: 'Nicholas, darling, I have *the* most marvelous idea. I'll go *with* you. I'd thought of Palm Beach. On Peter's account. He must meet the right people. But it doesn't *matter*. I can persuade him. I give it *up*,' said the Princess, throwing up one scarlet-tipped hand in a gesture of renunciation.

'You mustn't change your plans on my account,' her brother said hastily. 'Besides — er — Diana's going with me.'

'Oh, the little Vermont girl! How *nice* of you, Nicholas. I always say there's no *end* to what you do for the family. It will do *wonders* for her to be with you.'

'Wonders for me, you mean.'

'It's like you to put it that way. Just modesty. To be with a distinguished man like you will form her manners.'

'Is there something wrong with them?'

He spoke curtly. That pain had burrowed into his arm again.

'No. No. Not at *all*. A little rustic and shy, perhaps. Possibly she felt overdressed,' the Princess said charitably. 'Elaborate clothes often ——'

'Elaborate! What are you talking about? They're simple enough.'

'To a man, yes. But women, you know, have a sort of instinct. I'm not a bit *clever*, but I can sense Schiaparelli just the way a mouse can find *cheese* in the dark. I feel it in my *elbows*,' explained the Princess, and added kindly: 'She'll be needing cruise things. I would so like to help. Something suitable and girlish. I know a little dress shop . . .'

'Thank you, Sophia. I'll tell her you've offered.'

Nicholas Joceneyn turned a longing glance at 'The New-comes,' but his sister went on relentlessly: 'Is she educated to support herself at all? What will she do after your cruise?'

'Live here, I hope.'

'That's so *generous* of you, Nicholas. And yet — I'm going to be awfully *modern* and it may *shock* you — isn't that making a *dependent* of her? You know young people want their own work. Their own place. Take Peter, for instance. He is happy because he *creates*. I insisted on his having his own studio. I never go into it without invitation. Never. He goes to it by the back way. Has his own world. His own friends. And his own ideas,' concluded the Princess nursing one wrist with the other hand.

'I always thought he'd do well in business,' Nicholas Joceneyn said.

'Why, Nicholas, you know what a failure he was in the Tea Company.'

This was old ground. Nicholas Joceneyn coughed and said nothing.

His sister went on: 'Modern girls need a career. A girl with background can always get into a good dress shop. I could speak to Maria Towers . . .'

'It won't be necessary for Diana to work in a shop. Those jobs ought to be for girls who need them.'

'But, Nicholas — forgive me for bringing it up — even you aren't immortal. I do hope you've provided for her — in case . . .'

'I've left her something. A — a little annuity,' he said. 'Don't worry, Sophia.'

If the Princess detected a note of irony in his voice, she did not admit it. She settled her furs, and gave another glance at Stephen Joceneyn's portrait of his wife: a patronizing glance. She felt sorry for the poor thing. And a little annuity for her daughter was perfectly suitable.

'It's lucky she's going away,' thought the Princess, putting on her gloves. 'By the time she gets back Peter can be somewhere else. A little annuity . . . How easily I found it out. Anna need not talk about tact.'

As it was not Princess Lobanov's habit to run hooks into a fish after she had caught it, she now left her brother to his reading.

He felt strangely breathless after her visit. For a few minutes he did not even try to find his place in 'The New-comes,' but sat still with the cold pipe in his hand.

He thought with a gasp of annoyance of what the Princess said about Diana's being overdressed. The pain burrowed along his arm again. He muttered: 'Are you there, old Truepenny?'

He thought for a moment of calling Doctor Lomond.

'He'll only send me to bed. I'm going on that cruise. Be all right when I get on the boat,' he thought, fumbling for a match. 'Jealousy, that's all,' he said, half aloud, thinking of his sister. 'She won't get a chance to buy Diana any girl scout outfit.'

He looked up into Carol Joceneyn's placid blue eyes. When

the picture first hung there, he had never looked at it without shame — not anger at the treachery of the two people he had loved best, not jealousy, not resentment even over having been made ridiculous, but shame — a dull, sick ache because the dishonor of others had touched his own integrity. That feeling faded. Pity took its place, but pity is an emotion that needs something to live on. It faded too; became as the years went by little more than a habit of looking sometimes at a pleasantly colored canvas in a frame of dull gold.

This afternoon the picture seemed real again, and he made his promise to see about the cruise partly to the picture, partly to himself.

‘Tomorrow,’ he said aloud. ‘In the morning.’

But in the morning Nicholas Joceneyn was dead.

Chapter 10

REAL, PERSONAL, AND MIXED

IN THE PREPARATIONS for Nicholas Joceneyn's funeral Diana had, she felt, no part. Indeed there was no reason, she told herself, why she should. Everything was carried out with admirable efficiency. This was no matter, as it had been when Stephen Joceneyn died, of amateurishly setting folding chairs in a house swept clean by the hands of the neighbors. No one brought pickle bottles with sprays of apple blossoms, nor brown jugs crammed with cowslips to Paul Revere Square. No one ran in with a batch of doughnuts, or a dish of codfish in cream, or platters of macaroni and salmon salad — 'just in case the men folks might want a lunch.' There was no respectful creaking of the heavy boots of sun-burned men in dark blue serge; no kitchen full of women in flowered prints silently appraising the polish of the stove; no small child prattling through the minister's eulogy.

... Our departed brother was a good neighbor. He came here to East Alcott from larger spheres, but he was always, as folks say here, a 'common' man, friendly to young and

old. He loved these hills from whence cometh our strength and every flower and fern that grows...

There was no place for Diana's small experience, nor for her grief in the consultations in the cold library. Ushers... Honorary pallbearers... Mount Auburn... Earnestly requested... no flowers... Casket closed... covered with laurel — no, not laurel — Horticultural Society people would notice: laurel has to be conserved. Definitely... Ivy, yes, a wreath of ivy... His class at Harvard on the right... Museum... From the Symphony... the Fogg... Department heads of the Tea Company... Can't seat the other employees... Food afterward? Not necessary. Just the family.

Not that Diana was neglected. Ebenezer Joceneyn Keith was too efficient for that. She was politely summoned to the conferences, politely consulted, politely told that she had better wear black until after the funeral. Not longer. Joceneyns never mourned. It was considered insincere — after the funeral.

Mr. Keith, who made this explanation, was a young man who had a faculty of looking at you without apparently seeing you; of listening to you without seeming to hear you. He sniffed with his austere chiseled nose at some lilies that someone had sent in defiance of the edict in the *Transcript*, but whether he actually smelled them is doubtful. He gave Diana a thin hand like the tail of a dead haddock and took it away again apparently without feeling the warmth of hers.

She felt an irritation with him, unreasonable considering that he was the only member of the family who paid her any attention at all. To the others she was — in the old black

dress that she had put on again — no more significant than an old umbrella that Nicholas Jockey might have left in the stand with his malacca canes, a shabby umbrella with a gilt knob. Gilt, not gold.

Princess Lobanov had relieved an anxiety that for a few hours pressed hard on the minds of the family. 'A small annuity,' she had reported and the Jockey clan was able to go calmly about the mourning rites.

Diana resented the calm. She resented the phrases of resignation... Thank you so much... Yes, in his sleep. We are naturally upset but... hopeless... never would have been well... Yes, beautiful way to go... Release... we couldn't wish... spared suffering... Yes, time heals all wounds.

All wounds that are skin deep, Diana thought savagely, and yet with a knowledge that wounds did heal. Even if you didn't want them to. Even if you tried to keep them open. When her father died, she felt as if blood were oozing drop by drop from some internal hurt. Yet in six months that wound had healed, except when some east wind of recollection set it aching.

This ache over her uncle would stop, too, before long. There was more compassion in it than grief — the same compassion she might have felt for a small boy shut out of the circus.

'Release!' 'Spared suffering!' He didn't *want* release. He wanted to live. To sail to Hawaii. And the door had been shut in his face. Did he know it was going to shut, she wondered. No, I don't think so. When I said that last night, 'This was the best day of all,' he laughed and said, 'There are better ones coming. Lots of them.' I don't think he knew.

She had plenty of time to think in those days before the funeral. Her own future tugged at her for consideration, but she pushed it aside.

'Perhaps,' she thought, 'that animated ice-pick will give me a job in the Tea Company. I could run one of those machines that grab pinches of tea and tie it into bags. I'm not going to worry. I'm exactly like all the others — thinking of themselves. I will study about Chinese porcelain. Uncle Nicholas told me to read his books. I will.'

By reading the big, worn books, by checking pictures with the actual bowls and vases, Diana kept the thought of the future at bay. But if she was, or seemed, neglectful of it, there were others who did not take it so lightly. The idea, entertained by Diana, that no one but Eben Keith paid her any attention was an illusion. At the very moment when she began to read the Encyclopaedia Britannica on Ceramics, her aunts were making plans for her. That is, Princess Lobanov and Mrs. Keith were making plans. Mrs. Shatswell, whose blue eyes and pleasant pink face were swollen and distorted by tears, was, as usual in a crisis, no help at all.

It was the Princess who suggested that they ought to do something for Diana.

'I thought you said that Nicholas ——' Mrs. Shatswell stopped and wiped her eyes. She did so every time her brother's name was mentioned.

The Princess was weary of this gesture which she considered sentimental, as no doubt it was, but she said with admirable patience: 'Yes, the little annuity. But the life of a woman on a little annuity with no career, no interests. It's a deplorable position.'

‘We might add to it,’ said Mrs. Shatswell. ‘And I could always give her a home. Polly likes her.’

‘You’re surely not suggesting making a *charity* case out of her!’ the Princess exclaimed. ‘That’s not *constructive*, Bessie. Anna, you’re so *wonderful* about girls with all those *committees* and things — can’t you think of something *constructive*?’

Mrs. Keith said in her deep, hoarse voice: ‘Training. Vocational. Obviously. Perhaps Simmons.’

‘That would be nice,’ Mrs. Shatswell said; ‘she would be here four years and she could live with me.’

It had not escaped the Princess that this plan would mean that Diana would be in Boston for four years.

‘That seems a long course,’ she said thoughtfully, ‘because Diana must be twenty-four or five already.’

‘Twenty-one,’ Mrs. Shatswell said. ‘It’s in my birthday book. I remember...’

Princess Lobanov never hesitated to plunge into Mrs. Shatswell’s river of memory.

‘I think I’ve heard of a course, not in Boston I’m afraid — now, where was it — oh, yes, New York. Tea-room management. Just takes a year. And then a girl can open up some quaint old country tavern in Vermont and call it the Purple Parrot and have lots of Mexican pottery in the gift shop. And, of course, she could get her tea wholesale. Anna could speak to Eben about it.’

The Princess paused after this burst of inspiration and looked at her sisters. Mrs. Keith nodded so briskly that her stiff white pompadour skidded. She straightened it and said: ‘Very suitable.’

Mrs. Shatswell said: ‘Nicholas would like that. About

the tea, I mean,' and, after wiping her eyes, added: 'We could all help pay for the school. And then buy things. I always thought myself I would like to have a little tea and gift shop. Of course I wouldn't know where to find all those things they have in them. I always say I can't see how people are so clever to think them up. Why, half the time I don't even know what they are. It must be expensive to get enough, but we could all subscribe.'

'Yes, we could, of course.'

Princess Lobanov brought out a black-and-silver cigarette holder — she was in mourning until after the funeral, so the jade one was out of commission — and what looked like a slab of aspic jelly with cigarettes embedded in it.

'About a thousand apiece,' Mrs. Shatswell suggested.

After a moment of silence during which the Princess blew smoke thoughtfully between the prisms of an ormolu candlestick, Mrs. Shatswell marked her suggestion down to five hundred dollars.

Mrs. Keith said she scarcely thought they need decide on a definite sum now. Circumstances could govern that. The Princess said there would be plenty of time to go into details later. Especially as Diana would have her little annuity.

'What she needs just now,' the Princess said, 'is not money, but advice.'

It was decided to give her advice.

Diana was unprepared for the beauty of the funeral. East Alcott would have found it cold — the stiff pattern of square white pews full of dark figures, the classic formality of the music, the austerity of the wreath of ivy on the black pall. It was all as impersonal as the cadences of the service,

She had never heard the service before, yet it was as familiar as wind in pines, or distant thunder, or the sea running in over smooth pebbles. It expressed Nicholas Jockey better than any eloquence about him. Under the pressure of the quiet phrases Diana felt her resentment vanish. Instead came the sense that her relation to her uncle, brief as it was, had been a real thing and was so still; that it had an existence quite independent of his death, an existence as actual as that of his Ming yellow jars. It was not simply that she would remember his kindness. It still protected and sheltered her. She felt that it always would.

In this mood the reading of her uncle's will in the chilly library had for her a quality of unreality. She hardly listened to the piled mountains of benevolence. Eben Keith was one of the executors, she noticed, and she saw him straighten into a pose of new dignity. The long list of public bequests seemed only an echo of the institutions represented in the square pews. Harvard... Symphony... Horticulture... Museum of... Society for... The pages rattled in Follingsby Clifton's stiff fingers and his voice rattled on. Thousands. Tens of thousands. Hundreds of thousands. They fell as swiftly as peas rattling into a pan.

She had no sense of the number of peas — or dollars. Only that they were falling. They rained on down: small bequests to friends, comfortable legacies to the servants, annuities to distant cousins, even a small one for herself. In her gratitude she hardly felt a growing tension in the darkening room.

The only light was the green-shaded reading-lamp beside Mr. Clifton. The papers were white under it. Mr. Clifton's stiff cuffs were white. His hands were a brownish-gray. His

spiky gray hair had a greenish glare on it from the lampshade. So did his bristly mustache and his thin pale cheeks.

The big dim room had a great many dark figures in it. Diana's eyes grew used to the light, she began to recognize some of them. The servants were in a group behind her. She knew Minna's loud breathing, Sarah's cough, and Hannah's snuffle. She could hear Burwell clear his throat, and the little kitchenmaid's murmur of 'Saints bless him, the good man,' when her own name appeared among the legacy-holders. Across the room on the window-seat were three men. Peter was one of them. He sat with his touzled head and square-nosed profile dark against one window, looking out through another into the twilight. The high-shouldered figure with the narrow head was Eben Keith's. He turned often and the light glinted on his spectacles. The round-faced, sleekly brushed one must be Bill Shatswell, she supposed. Even in the fading light there was a kind look about him that reminded her of Aunt Bessie.

She could see her aunts clearly. They were near the lamp.

Mrs. Keith sat very straight in a high-backed chair. Mrs. Shatswell filled most of a small sofa. Her handkerchief was a wet ball in her plump, pink hand. Princess Lobanov leaned back gracefully in a chair of scarlet leather. Her eyes were half-closed and her long hands were quiet in her lap, but the light shifted on her ankles as she crossed and uncrossed her feet.

A sallow, sulky-looking, black-haired boy was watching the Princess's feet. He kept a thin hand tugging at his black hair, sometimes pushing it back from a high square forehead, sometimes pulling it down so that it flopped over his steel-rimmed spectacles. Occasionally he took his eyes

off the Princess's feet and scowled at Diana's instead. After a while he used his right hand to pull his left ear forward and worked at his hair with his left hand. Having disarranged it to his satisfaction, he massaged the twist in his long nose for a while. At last he thrust both hands into his pockets and leaned forward with his eyes on the lawyer.

This movement was only part of a ripple of motion that went through the room. The little man who occupied the other third of Mrs. Shatswell's sofa smoothed his black beard to a neater point. Two of the men on the window-seat shifted their positions slightly. Mrs. Keith sat even more stiffly in her stiff chair. Mrs. Shatswell blew her nose. Princess Lobanov uncrossed her feet and tapped the toe of the right one twice on the rug. Only Peter Lobanov continued to stare out at the iron settee in the garden. Or perhaps at the brick wall behind it. At any rate he did not move.

Neither did Diana.

To my sister Anna Joceneyn Keith . . . To my sister Elizabeth Joceneyn Shatswell . . . To my sister Sophia Joceneyn Lobanov.

Diana wondered if they were satisfied with what he had left them — sums so large that she herself could hardly grasp them. Did Mrs. Keith and the Princess like the fact that Mrs. Shatswell, because she had two sons, had received twice as much as the others. There was no telling by their faces. Aunt Bessie was mopping hers with a clean handkerchief that the little man with the beard had poked at her. The Princess and Mrs. Keith preserved their admirable indifference.

Were the three men on the window-seat annoyed because they had received only small sums — 'to buy something as a

remembrance.' There was no telling from their faces. How did they like Singleton's getting more 'because he has never asked me for money'? How did they feel about the legacy to the absent Nick? No telling...

'And I further direct that my executors shall cancel sums owed me by my sister Sophia Jocene Lobanov not exceeding thirty thousand dollars...'

Princess Lobanov preserved her pose of graceful languor. Her long white hands lay quiet against her black dress. Even her feet were still. Her only movement was to touch with her pointed scarlet tongue the scarlet slash of her lips.

Mrs. Keith received some furniture. She murmured, 'How good of Nicholas.' Apparently it was all right to express gratitude for a mahogany sideboard if not for money. Mrs. Shatswell sobbed out loud over a legacy of jewelry and silver.

'Up to this point,' Mr. Clifton said, 'the will duplicates one drawn last year. The only change is in the following provision':

'All the rest, residue and remainder of my property, real, personal, and mixed, wheresoever situate, which I may own and possess and to which I may be entitled at the time of my death, I give, devise, and bequeath to my niece, Diana Jocene...'

The room seemed to swing around Diana's head. Then it stood still in a grim silence full of eyes. And Mr. Clifton's voice went on, 'and I request that she catalogue and classify my collection of Chinese earthenware and porcelain and make it available to students.... I make this bequest partly because of my affection for my niece's parents; partly in gratitude for her companionship.'

The black-haired boy had turned his thick spectacles on

her. She saw that behind the lenses his eyes were brilliant, gentle, and understanding. They reminded her of her uncle's and brought a dazzle of tears to her own eyes. He saw them and looked away.

Eben Keith broke the silence with his harsh, high voice.

'But the Tea Company — it means he's left her the Tea Company. It's insane.'

He strode out of the shadows toward Mr. Clifton.

'Mr. Joceneyn no longer owned Joceneyn & Company, Eben,' Mr. Clifton said curtly, and went on folding up the thick sheets.

Eben Keith said hoarsely: 'Didn't *own* it? Didn't own the *business*?' And the hiss of the word business ran around the room.

'Not in the sense that you mean, Eben. It is still part of his estate, but your uncle had for some time doubted the wisdom or practicability of trying to maintain Joceneyn & Company as a family business,' Mr. Clifton said, still busily folding. 'He felt that under the present government such companies were doomed. Some months ago he took steps to make the company into a profit-sharing corporation. The papers have been ready for several weeks. The plans were delayed because of his illness. Last Friday and Saturday he completed the arrangements. That is, he has indicated what he wished done and left it in the hands of three trustees to carry out the plan.'

'Why, he couldn't do that. My mother. My aunts. They owned the business too,' Eben Keith said, lowering his narrow head so that the green light from the lamp flashed on his spectacles.

'Your mother and her sisters sold their interest in Joceneyn

& Company to Mr. Nicholas Joceleyn more than a year ago.'

'Why wasn't I told about this? After all, I'm Assistant Manager of the Company.'

'Possibly because you were in Tuckerman's Ravine,' Mr. Clifton suggested dryly.

Eben Keith turned angrily toward his mother.

'You — why didn't you — ?'

'Nicholas wanted to carry out his plan without publicity,' Mrs. Keith said coldly. 'We can discuss this later. In private.'

The servants, guided by Burwell, had already left the room. Diana slipped out after them, but not in time to miss hearing Eben Keith say furiously: 'And this residuary legatee hocus-pocus; who was his residuary legatee before?' And Mr. Clifton's answer: 'His former will was destroyed, Eben. Its provisions don't concern us.'

Eben's voice rose still higher: 'Gratitude for companionship! Two or three weeks' companionship. Pretty fishy. I've a good mind to take it into court...'

Chapter 11

ARRIVAL AT NIGHT

THE VOICES IN THE LIBRARY rose and fell. They boomed and grated, whined and shrilled in a discordant clash of sound.

Diana was glad she had escaped. Apparently no one had missed her. She stood on the landing looking down into the hall. Burwell stood by the front door. His pose was all correctness, but there was a grin of enjoyment on his face as he listened to the sound and fury in the library.

This expression faded into bland politeness as Diana's aunts appeared. She waited to see if they would ask for her, but they went quickly through the hall without speaking. Mrs. Keith's rubber heels thudded on the marble. Mrs. Shatswell lumbered along, pushed rather than supported by her bearded little husband. The Princess slithered languidly through the hall. A few paces behind her came a woman Diana had not noticed before. She saw now only the top of a black hat, beautifully arranged silvery hair, and a straight, slight figure in dark gray tweed. There was something

curiously calm and peaceful about her way of moving. Behind her the harsh voices in the library still sounded. Ahead of her the tense group of the Joceleyn sisters hurried. Bertram Shatswell, the poet of the Square, stabbed the air fiercely with his beard as he looked for his hat.

He did not look at the woman behind him, but Burwell did.

'Burwell's a mirror,' thought Diana, seeing the impervious courtesy with which he shut the door behind Princess Lobanov mellow to something quite different.

The others, in spite of their haste, had said good night to the butler politely enough, but it was the impersonal politeness that advertises the speaker's ideal in manners. The woman in gray tweed, however, regarded Burwell as a human being.

'You will miss him most of all, Burwell. I'm sorry,' she said gently, and gave him her hand.

'I — I — He was ——' Burwell choked, coughed, but managed at last a 'Thank you, Mrs. Joceleyn,' that was only an approximation of his usual manner.

Mrs. Joceleyn must, Diana realized, be her Uncle John's widow to whom her sisters-in-law wouldn't speak even at a funeral. Burwell shut the door behind Mrs. Joceleyn and for a moment leaned his forehead against one of its walnut panels. Then, hearing footsteps, he turned and straightened into correct and glassy imperturbability.

Diana could not see Singleton Shatswell shrug himself out of the library, but she did hear the door open and slam and the men's voices fade into a distant rumble behind it.

Out of the dark spot under the staircase slouched Singleton's gangling figure. The silence of the hall was broken by

his petulant voice saying to the butler: 'That girl, Burwell — where did she go?'

The question did two things to Diana. She hadn't felt she was eavesdropping before, only waiting in case anyone wanted her. Singleton's question made her feel like an eavesdropper, but it also made her think: 'Here's someone who wants me. Even if it's the funny-looking boy, like a young Aldous Huxley, only plainer, it's something.'

The force of the two thoughts impelled her downstairs and she found herself looking up into Singleton Shatswell's scowling face and having her hand crushed painfully in a warm bony clasp.

'I'm — how do you do — I'm Sing Shatswell. Polly said — I thought ——' he mumbled in a new bass voice which had tenor notes in surprising places; and then added more clearly, 'Cousin, across the Square.'

'I know,' Diana smiled up at him, and saw that, while his mouth still looked sulky, there was a flicker behind the spectacles that was very likely intended for a smile.

It disappeared quickly as he jerked his black head toward the library, saying: 'Conference for men only. Eben makes me sick. I'm just as much a nephew as the rest of 'em. Needn't keep tellin' me I'm a minor.'

'You don't look much like one from down here,' Diana observed. 'How old are you really — nineteen?'

'Seventeen, next month.'

Singleton relaxed his pouting expression and grinned suddenly, an exercise that disclosed the fact that he wore bands on his teeth.

'Wear size twelve shoes and I'm six feet two,' he announced. 'It's natural enough you'd make the mistake.'

But believe it or not by Ripley that's what I am. Seventeen. Practically. And I could fix Eben Keith with one hand so he'd look as if he'd been down Tuckerman's on his nose.'

He brooded on this pleasant thought for a moment, and then added: 'The dirty little will-breaker.'

'He can't really, can he?'

'Clifton says not. Says Uncle Nicholas was saner than any of us. "Go right ahead, Eben," he said, "and try to break it. It'll be splendid," he said, "for the lawyers. There's nothing lawyers like better than a good fat will case. Remember 'Bleak House,'" he said. Eben said he didn't. It'd be pretty tough on Eben to have to read "Bleak House." He moves his lips when he reads,' Singleton Shatswell remarked solemnly. 'Doesn't he, Burwell?'

'I have had no opportunity of judging,' said Burwell frostily. 'Would you like your coat, Mr. Singleton?'

'You can't get rid of me so easy. They're going to call me in again. Clifton's representing me legally, for the moment. I insisted on legal representation,' Singleton announced. 'I may be a minor, but I know a few tricks. Old Clifton admitted I was right. Pretty good old bird. Daresay I'll take him on permanently.'

Burwell here made a sound that was either a cough or a snort. It was interrupted by a sharp ring of the doorbell.

A taxi-driver thrust his peaked cap into Burwell's face. A blast of wind from the icy river blew in, bringing with it the words: 'Jocelyn's — this is Jocelyn's all right, ain't it?'

Burwell admitted that it was, and reduced the opening slightly.

The taxi-driver growled: 'Well, keep it open. I got a

visitor for you,' and went down the steps announcing to his passenger, 'O.K. Mister. This is the house. They tried keeping the number a secret, but I hit it right, just the same.'

He came back again shortly with his hand on the arm of a tall man.

'One more step and *there* we are. I'll bring the bags, sir. Don't trip over the mat, sir.'

'I'm all right,' the tall man said impatiently. He did not take off his hat, a soft one, pulled down over his eyes. It cast a shadow over the upper part of his face, but did not conceal the two dark circles of glass that covered his eyes. The collar of his tweed coat was turned up around his chin. His right sleeve hung empty. He had a stick in the other hand. He stood there leaning on it for a second, perhaps. Then drew a long breath and said: 'Burwell.'

It was hard, Diana thought, to tell whether it was a question or a greeting.

There was a little pause. Then Burwell — she could hear the breath catch in his throat — held out his hand, saying, 'Mr. Nick! Excuse me, sir. I didn't recog — didn't know you were coming.'

The younger Nicholas Joceneyn, the only one now, did not take the thick reddish hand that Burwell held out.

He said lightly, 'I'm glad to — to see you, Burwell.'

For a moment Diana seemed to see, not the man who spoke, but the figure that had dropped out of the clouds the day of the eclipse. A voice in her head seemed to say, 'But he had on smoked glasses then too.' And another voice gasped, 'Don't let him be blind. Please don't let him be blind.'

He moved across the hall, with the cane tucked under his

arm, touched first the black-walnut hatrack, then the top of the high-backed chair that stood beside it — a throne-like chair of dark carving and faded red velvet — and sat down in it.

‘Smells just the same,’ he said, smiling. It was a smile that drew his mouth to one side, creased his cheek, deepened what was almost a cleft in his chin. ‘Tea-leaves. You still sweep the stair carpet with tea-leaves. And smoky Souchong, I’ll bet. Polish the boots with Day and Martin’s? Right. Dining-room table with linseed oil. Boiled linseed. And keep russet apples in the storeroom?’

‘Yes, Mr. Nick. We do, sir.’

Burwell looked anxiously at the figure in the big chair, then turned to the door through which the taxi-man was now thrusting a number of bags. Their owner paid no attention to them, but lay back against the red velvet shivering.

Singleton Shatswell said: ‘I guess you don’t know me, Nick. I was just a kid when you went away. Lots of people don’t know me, on account of I’m six feet two now. How you’ve grown, Singleton, they all say, but I’ve never choked any of ’em yet.’

Nick Joceneyn said, ‘I’m having a little trouble with my eyes, Sing. I can’t really see the full extent just now.’

He held out his left hand. Singleton did his bone-crushing operation on it. ‘Gosh, that’s too bad. Pinkeye, is it? I had it myself last fall. There’s a lot of it around,’ he said.

Nick Joceneyn only said, ‘What a grip!’ He shook his fingers into shape and added, ‘Leave me one hand, you young brute.’

Burwell picked up the luggage that the driver had left in the vestibule. Diana had been retreating slowly up the

stairs. The idea that this was now her house and that she ought to act as hostess in it did not occur to her. She still felt like an intrusive stranger, and her only idea was to get out of the way without its being obvious that she was doing so. The result was that something like a procession took place on the stairs: Diana walking ahead, trying not to hurry; Nick Joceleyn moving quickly with his left hand resting lightly on the stair rail; Burwell stumping after him with a large box marked 'FRAGILE' under one arm, a briefcase under the other, and a bag in his hand.

Nick Joceleyn talked gaily over his shoulder to Burwell.

'Same old stair carpet, isn't it, Burwell? Ink-spot — *my* ink-spot ought to be three steps from the top. Is it still there?'

'Right under your foot, Mr. Nick.'

'Why, so it is. Hope no one's touched my room. The most comfortable bed in the world's in that room. Has my uncle come in? It must be almost time for him. Do they still set the clocks in the Square by him?'

Diana was only a little way ahead of them, starting up the next flight of stairs.

Burwell saw her.

'Miss Diana,' he said, 'would you wait a minute, please? This is Miss Diana, Mr. Nick. She'll ——'

Nick Joceleyn snatched off his hat. The white glare from the hall chandelier fell full on his face, showing white patches of hair near his temples, the dark stubble on his hollow cheeks, the slender arched nose pinched with pain at the nostrils, and the line of pain between the dark brows. The brilliance of the smile that he turned toward Diana was cancelled by the two blank black circles of dark glass.

'Sorry,' he said. 'I didn't — see you. How do you do?'

He dropped his hat and held out his left hand, saying in a low, rapid tone that was a little like someone talking in his sleep, 'Nuisance, having only one hand,' and then, as her left hand touched his, 'Extraordinary, how few people will give you their left hand. Sort of intelligence test.'

His hand was hot and dry. Her brief contact with it seemed to burn her, and yet there was about those strong fingers an impersonality that was almost cold. He let her hand go quickly, shivering as if it chilled him to touch it, and said again, still in that rapid, sleep-walking tone: 'You didn't tell me about my uncle, Burwell. When can I see him, do you think? I have something for him, a box. Did you see a box? Fragile. China clipper people said leave it. Too much luggage. I said, All right. Leave something else. Clothes. Have to take the box. Fragile... Did you say he hadn't come in yet?'

Burwell said helplessly: 'Your uncle, Mr. Nick — your uncle's — Miss Diana, would you — I can't —'

He trudged up the next flight of stairs with the bags and the box marked 'fragile,' leaving Diana to see the realization of what Burwell meant etch the lines of pain deeper into Nick Joceleyn's face.

'He's not ——' He stepped back to the wall and leaned against it. 'He's not ——' he repeated.

'I'm sorry,' Diana said gently. 'He died Monday night.'

He stood silent for a moment. She could hear the clock on the landing below them ticking off the seconds.

Then he said quietly and simply, 'He was kind to me, always,' and after another brief pause, 'Were you with him?'

‘Yes. He spoke of you. Almost the last thing he said was, “Tell Nick — I knew he would win.”’

‘I wonder what he meant.’

‘I thought it must be something about China. He talked about what you were doing there. Kept a map with pins stuck in. Only that day I’d changed them for him.’

‘He was wrong, I’m afraid,’ Nick Joceneyn said. ‘About China, or anything else.’ He spoke without bitterness in his tone. Simply as if he were stating a fact, and then added, this time with a tremor in his quiet voice, ‘I’m — sorry I was too late.’

His voice changed suddenly to a confused mutter. He seemed for a few moments to have lost the sense of where he was. Out of the rapid flow of words she could recognize only the phrase, repeated several times in that feverish tone: ‘I let him down. After all he did for me, I let him down.’

‘Don’t say that,’ she said quietly, as his muttering stopped for a second. ‘He didn’t think so. I know he didn’t.’

‘Is that true?’ he asked. ‘Forgive me. But — everything whirls so. I can’t tell just where . . . Are you close to me?’

He put his hand out and she took it in hers.

‘Yes, I’m here,’ she said, feeling the heat of his hand run along the nerves of her arm — a strange feeling, electric, tingling. ‘Please believe me. I know he forgave you if there was anything to forgive. He was proud of you. He told me so.’

‘It sounds true. Your hand feels true. And kind.’ He let it go, and said, speaking clearly and sensibly now: ‘But even then I am too late. There was a report he asked for. I had that at least. Clifton — I ought to see Clifton . . .’

‘Mr. Clifton and your cousins are in the library.’

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘I’ll go down, then.’

As he moved down the stairs with his hand touching the top of the black-walnut dado, she had the feeling that she was seeing someone walking in his sleep.

Chapter 12

MATCHES

FOLLINGSBY CLIFTON SAID: 'Eben, let me remind you that you are an executor of the will, unless you decline to act.' So at last Eben Keith was silent. He sat on the edge of his chair twisting and untwisting his cold fingers. Peter Lobanov still lounged on the window-seat, but Bill Shatswell had moved and was sitting on the arm of the sofa. He ran a large red hand over his sleekly brushed brown hair. Sometimes he moved his handsome puzzled blue eyes from the elaborately perforated toes of his shoes to the lawyer's face.

Bill's thoughts moved slowly. Eben Keith's moved fast.

He said: 'Mr. Clifton — this residuary legatee business. I think I'm entitled to ask for a statement from you. Will there be anything left over? Will the bequests be paid in full?'

'The bequests,' Mr. Clifton snapped, 'will be paid in full. The amount in excess is somewhat uncertain. It depends somewhat on the stock market. Somewhat on the winding-up of the affairs of Joceneyn & Company. Those employees

who have been consulted have agreed to buy stock in the new co-operative organization, but as your uncle is not here to carry it through, there may be difficulties that have not been anticipated. We might, for instance, have to take back a larger amount of stock in the Company than we had expected, and its success under the new management is, of course, not assured.'

Mr. Clifton had rattled off these remarks briskly. Now he paused and snapped the rubber band around his papers three times.

After this pizzicato passage he announced crisply, 'Best guess is, residuary estate, about a million.'

'Of course,' he added, 'I must know whether you are to act as executor.'

'I shall not refuse to act,' Eben said coldly and slowly, but his mind was far ahead of his tongue. 'It wouldn't be for the good of the family. That to me is paramount. My mother ——' Then, seeing his cousins moving toward the door, he said more quickly: 'Don't go, Bill. Stay a minute, Peter. We ought to discuss things. You can go, Singleton.'

During Sing's protests and final departure, sulking and growling, Peter lounged back on the window-seat. Bill sat on a table and examined his shoes again.

'This is a serious matter,' Eben said. 'This money, possibly a considerable sum, is left in the hands of an inexperienced girl. It was not like Uncle Nicholas to do anything thoughtless. Obviously he did this with intention, and although the will does not mention it, I believe his purpose is clear.'

Peter looked at Eben sidewise and murmured: 'That's because you're so clever, Eben. It's not clear to me.'

‘Obviously,’ Eben repeated, ‘he intended one of us to marry her.’

Peter gave a short laugh. Mr. Clifton coughed. Bill opened his mouth and shut it again.

‘If my uncle had this intention,’ Eben went on, ‘Mr. Clifton may know it. There may even, I suppose, be a message.’

‘There was no message,’ the lawyer said quietly.

‘Nevertheless,’ Eben said, ‘I think he can scarcely have left her unprotected, a prey to fortune-hunters. It seems clear that he intended one of us to marry her.’

‘Which one?’ Peter asked in a tone that was not a favorite of Eben’s.

‘That, of course,’ Eben said, ‘is for her to choose.’

The silence that followed was broken by Bill’s remarking, ‘She didn’t look the sort that’d yank a horse’s mouth.’

Eben Keith said: ‘So you’re a candidate, are you?’

Bill said slowly: ‘It’s only — the children. I’d like to make a home for them. Mrs. Nesbitt’s awfully kind, of course. But somebody younger... If my uncle really wanted it... But oughtn’t we to let Nick know? Because he’d be the one, wouldn’t he, really?’

‘I suppose so,’ Eben said, without enthusiasm.

‘He wouldn’t come,’ Peter said from the window-seat.

Eben gave his short fox-bark of a laugh.

‘Oh, wouldn’t he? I’ll bet he’ll be enough interested in Miss Diana Joceleyne and a million dollars to make better time than when it was simply a question of my uncle’s illness and the business needing him.’

Peter said angrily, ‘Nick’s more mercenary than anyone else, I suppose.’

Nick Joceneyn said from the doorway: 'It would be interesting to know what you are talking about. Just vulgar curiosity, of course.'

Peter spun around and ran forward, saying, 'Nick, old boy, when did you come?'

'Just now. Don't break my arm again, my Prince. And thanks for the defense of my character, which certainly needs it. I am, of course, mercenary, as Eben suggests, but in a nice way, I hope. Aren't we all?'

He moved slowly into the room with his left hand on Peter's arm.

Mr. Clifton said, 'I'm glad to see you, Nick.'

Bill made hearty sounds of greeting and added: 'Plane took the bit in its teeth, I hear. Rotten luck, about your arm.'

Eben Keith, whose pale face showed no signs of embarrassment, said calmly: 'I'm glad you've come, Nick. "Mercenary" is Peter's remark, not mine. You're naturally interested in Uncle Nicholas's will, as we all are, and I see no harm in having said so.'

Nick Joceneyn said: 'Thank you, Mr. Clifton. Arm's all right practically, Bill. Thanks. Why, no harm at all, Eben. I am, of course, interested in the will. Am I to hear it, Mr. Clifton? Or can you tell me about it? Too long to re-read, probably.'

'Your uncle, knowing that you were amply provided for, left you only five thousand dollars to buy some remembrance, and his library, with the wish that you may enjoy reading some of his and your old favorites.'

He summarized the rest of the will briefly.

Nick had reached the library table. He had picked up a

small elephant carved from a piece of white, red-flecked jade. It rested in the palm of his left hand and he was rubbing his fingers over it. The eyes of Nick Joceelyn's cousins were all turned on him as he listened, but his face told them nothing. His mouth and eyebrows were still. The dark glasses hid what his eyes might have betrayed. He kept on playing with the jade elephant. Once he rubbed it against his bristly cheek.

When the lawyer had finished reading, Nick put down the elephant and said vaguely: 'I met someone on the stairs. Was that — ?'

'Uncle Stephen's daughter? Probably,' Eben said crisply. 'Now, Nick, the point is — I've already been through this once — we all feel sure that Uncle Nicholas intended one of us to marry her.' He paid no attention to Peter's muttered 'What makes you think so?' and went on smoothly, outlining his plan.

They must give Miss Joceelyn a chance to know them. Entertain her. Take her about. After a suitable time had elapsed, of course. It would be wise, probably, for each to take a week at a time. Less confusing.

'We had better,' he said, 'bind ourselves not to propose to her until each has had his week, and then in inverse order.'

At this point Mr. Clifton gave that cough of his and started toward the door.

'I hope you don't feel that my uncle would have disapproved of Miss Joceelyn's marrying one of us,' Eben said.

'Not necessarily.'

'That means you think he wanted ——'

'He left no instructions,' the lawyer said, 'and unless you need me to draw up a legal agreement, Eben, I'll ask you to excuse me.'

Eben said a legal agreement would not be necessary.

'We can draw lots,' he said. 'Matches will do. A gentlemen's agreement, of course.'

'Of course!' said Peter.

Eben broke matches into four different lengths. He held them with their pink tips sticking out between his thumb and forefinger.

'The weeks will be in order of their length,' he said.

He pushed out his hand toward Peter, who did not look at it.

'Oh, our Prince isn't interested,' Eben said in his thin cold voice. 'Well, that's all the better for the common people. Your mother'll like to know. ♦ I can guess why, can't you, Bill?'

'No, I can't,' Bill said simply.

Peter got up, jerked a match from between Eben's fingers, and threw it in the fire.

'It was short,' he said. 'You'd better draw, Bill. I can't see why he wants us to, but he'll blackmail us into it evidently. To be foils for him probably.'

Bill said slowly: 'I don't understand any of this, you know. I don't like rushing things this way.' But he took a match. It had been broken in halves.

'Your turn, Nick,' Eben said.

Nick Jockey straightened his tall figure and stood up.

'There's excellent precedent for drawing lots, no doubt,' he said quietly, 'but I'm afraid I'm not a competitor.'

Eben Keith could not quite keep the note of relief out of his voice. He tried to make his 'That's interesting. Why not?' sound casual, but he failed.

The casualness was Nick's as he said lightly: 'I'm afraid I'm scarcely eligible. I'm blind.'

Chapter 13

PROPOSAL

BURWELL HAD SAID from the third-floor landing, 'Could you come up a moment, Miss Diana?' and he had started up the stairs. She had not seen Nick Joceleyn feel his way toward the library door, but she had heard it open and Eben Keith's shrill voice saying: 'Interested . . . Diana Joceleyn . . . million dollars . . .' had traveled clearly up the stairs.

Peter Lobanov's voice had been thick with anger, but the words, 'Nick's more mercenary than anyone else,' had thrust themselves into her unwilling consciousness.

Burwell's usually pink face had a gray look as he said: 'Excuse me, Miss Diana, asking you to come up. I didn't want Mr. Nick to hear. It's about his room . . .'

'Oh,' Diana said hastily. 'I didn't think. I'm sleeping there, of course. I'll move.'

'Minna and I will move your things. It was only to get your permission. We put you in that room when you came because the guest-room was over Mr. Joceleyn's. He is — he was always troubled by anyone walking over his head.'

She would miss the room with its model airplanes and the pictures of school teams on the walls, Diana thought. She had become quite fond of some of the plump-cheeked boy's faces that kept turning up in the pictures. Nick Jockey's thin one never really looked at her. He was always gazing abstractedly somewhere else. The pictures gave very little clue as to how he would look without his glasses.

(Don't let him be blind! Please don't let him be blind!)

She felt tired and dizzy as she went out, leaving Burwell and Minna conspiring, eagerly and pantingly, to clear Mr. Nick's room without letting him know they were doing it and to make as little trouble as possible for Miss Diana.

There was something pathetic about this eagerness. Nicholas Jockey's death had cast the shadow of a moving finger over their complacency. The shadowy finger itself touched them lightly, but always on some exposed nerve. It aroused uncomfortable thoughts... In Minna: I'm old... Fat... People like stylish parlormaid... Where shall I go?... The legacy? Yes, it will feed me, but... This is my home... such a comfortable dining-room... red cloth on the table... tea stewing on the range... Twenty years... And only one in the family — except when Mr. Nick came...

Visions, terrible visions, of families of three, four, or — indecent — even five, passed through her mind. She saw mountains of dishes to wash, the print of muddy feet on the stair carpet. Skis in the vestibule. Dogs. Dogs not thoroughly house-broken... Cats with long hair that came off on the seats of chairs. Lighted cigarettes on mahogany tables. Ashes on rugs. Smoke in curtains. Glasses that left sticky rings on the mantelpiece...

'We'll unpack now for Mr. Nick, Minna.'

‘Yes, Mr. Burwell. Right away.’

Not to be, Burwell thought, Mr. Nicholas Joceneyn’s man . . . Not to live in the shadow of the State House . . . People with names very nearly as good as Joceneyn lived in the suburbs now. And went to the mountains in the summer. Not the beach. *Mountains*. Not a yard of concrete within three miles. Movies and church ten miles away. Cows. Not another butler in the place. Poison ivy. Black flies.

‘That will do, Minna. I’ll send Sarah. You and she can attend to the linen.’

‘Yes, Mr. Burwell.’

His legs ached worse than ever on the stairs. Miss Diana’s voice came from the drawing-room. The porcelain room, Mr. Joceneyn had called it. Most of the china was there, though it overflowed into every room in the house.

‘I’d like to speak to you a minute, please, Burwell.’

‘Yes, Miss Diana.’

(Had it come? Was she going to give notice? . . . Suburbs . . . Mountains . . . Cocktails . . .)

She was standing near one of the cabinets with a book in her hand. She looked very small and slight in the dim room with its chests and cupboards and high dark windows. The dim light in the ceiling brought out the gold in her hair, but darkened the shadows under her eyes.

‘I wanted you to know, Burwell, that I’d be glad to have things go on as usual here for the present. Unless you have other plans.’

(No mountains . . . no poison ivy . . . no hay fever . . . Tremont Street . . . The Esplanade on hot evenings . . .)

‘Thank you, Miss Diana. I’m sure we would all be glad to be of assistance.’

He bowed solemnly and went out, but his steps were quick on the stairs. The ache in his legs had miraculously vanished.

Diana went back to her study of porcelain. She tried to keep her mind on the colored pictures in the book and find something like them in the cabinet, but the words she had heard when the library door opened kept thrusting themselves into her mind.

'Miss Diana Joceneyn . . . million dollars . . . Nick . . . mercenary.'

Why were her name and his and a million dollars being linked together not only in Eben Keith's shrill voice, but in Peter Lobanov's? She would not think about it, she decided firmly.

'No blue so beautiful as that of the Ming porcelains . . . (I wonder if that blue-and-white jar is Ming. How did he get here so quickly? Must have flown. China clipper. China — oh, yes . . .) Is that famille rose? Well, it's pink . . . What a help I'd be to students of porcelain . . .'

Someone came upstairs three steps at a time. Singleton Shatswell bounced into the room and shut the door behind him.

'Look here,' he said, his voice cracking. 'Look here. They can't make a monkey out of me. I'm his nephew as much as any of them. Suppose I *am* a little younger. Why, my mother's two years older than my father. I'm almost seventeen. You thought, yourself, I was nearly twenty. You don't look more than twenty. Practically you're no older than I am. You could give me a chance, couldn't you? I mean at least you wouldn't cross me off the list right off, would you? Because you're the only girl I ever saw I liked the looks of. I'm getting through school in June and

I won't go to college. I'll go to work. Get a job tasting tea. Uncle Nicholas said himself once I have the Joceleyn palate. How does a college education help your palate, I ask you? I wouldn't care about your money. I'd work. Million or no million. And after all I'm six feet two.'

For this outburst Diana found no answer, and Singleton went on breathlessly.

'They wouldn't have to pay me a million to marry you, believe *me*.'

'Just who is being paid to marry me?' Diana asked frostily.

'Why, no one exactly. But someone has to protect you. Uncle Nicholas wanted them to, Eben says. Eben protect anyone! That's a laugh! Nick left the door open and I heard it. I wouldn't have listened only they had no business to shove me out in the hall. I'm his nephew, I guess, just as much as E. Joceleyn Keith, the louse.'

'Do you think you ought to have told me? I wouldn't have let you, if I'd known what it was about.'

Singleton kicked at the rug with one of his number twelve feet and growled: 'Oh, I suppose not, but I was mad, and it made me sick to hear Eben being so virtuous. And I—I couldn't very well ask you to marry me without explaining,' he added reasonably. Seeing that Diana was apparently giving most of her attention to a green-and-pink jar he went on: 'All I thought was you might put me on the list. Because of course you don't know me much yet. Besides, gosh, a girl ought to know what goes on. You're not a sack of potatoes.'

Diana looked up into Singleton's scowling face. There was something besides the scowl, something behind the

thick glasses that kept her from laughing. She realized that the sulky look was a disguise for a genuine kindness.

She said: 'Thank you, Singleton. I'm not planning to marry anyone at present, but if I had a list, you'd be on it.'

The result of this speech was that Singleton again disclosed the dental conspiracy against the individuality of his front teeth, and began snapping his fingers in a series of reports slightly less noisy than a machine gun.

'So that makes four of us. And I'm one of them, Mr. E. Joceneyn Keith, even if you did say I was a minor and shoved me out. I'll show you whether I still play with a bucket and spade.'

'Four of you,' Diana said lightly.

'Yes. They were drawing matches. "Mine's the short match," Peter said. Matches to see which would have the first week taking you out. Four, counting me. Because Nick's not a candidate. I don't know why. Perhaps he's got another girl in China. It's likely, of course,' Singleton said with a worldly air; then, seeing that Diana did not look especially responsive, he went on, shuffling his large feet uneasily: 'Suffering sculpins! I hope you're not mad with me for listening — it was only ——'

'No, I'm not,' Diana said, moving toward the door. 'You're the first person who ever proposed to me.'

She slipped out of the door and was halfway upstairs before Singleton recovered enough to remark: 'Cataleptic codfish! I don't believe it.'

Chapter 14

DARKNESS

SHE HAD NOT MEANT TO CRY. Her father had hated tears. She had shed none over his death, although at times she longed for the sort of grief that is easily expressed and as easily healed; for the Celtic ability to throw an apron over the face, bawl and blubber behind it, emerge tear-stained and ready for a good meal of spare-ribs and cabbage.

Sobs and moans had ascended frequently from the kitchen during the last three days. Now the smell of cabbage and frying pork rose peacefully in their place. What there was about that smell to send the tears rolling down her cheeks, Diana could not possibly have told. She knew only that her fantastic weeks in Paul Revere Square had been too much for her.

She had made a friend and lost him. She had arrived with \$2.17 in her pocket and now had a million dollars tied around her neck. It couldn't really be a million, could it? — not after all the other enormous sums he had given away; but anyway people seemed to think it was... She had been

patronized by a Russian Princess and told that with the right training she could undoubtedly make six hundred dollars a year selling cinnamon toast and whimsical door-stops. She had learned the names of three pieces of porcelain and now owned one of the great collections of the country and was to 'make it available to students.' Well, she could put the green pieces in one room and the blue in the other, she supposed.

Four men were drawing lots to see which would be the one to marry her, and, although one of them 'wasn't a competitor,' the others seemed to think a million dollars would make it worth while. She hated them — hated them all. Eben Keith with his cold hands and eyes and cold politeness. That handsome one, as handsome as a doll — Bill Shatswell it must be. So pink and scrubbed and glossy and sleek. He'd looked at her out of those long-lashed eyes — sapphire marbles, that's what they looked like — as if she were a horse that was in the wrong stall. Only of course he would have been more interested in a horse. Talked to it probably . . .

Before the will was read, no one had paid any attention to her. Even Peter Lobanov, who had been so friendly the other day, had hardly looked at her. He had lounged in behind his mother looking like a sleepy kitten and had spent all his time staring out of the window.

Probably he was thinking up one of his revolting pictures.

And Nick Joceneyn. There was no reason for him to remember her — a blackberry-stained child with pig-tails — but for those moments on the stairs she had felt that they knew each other; understood each other. And now — it was foolish, she knew, to let that phrase 'not a competitor'

wound her, and yet it did. It hurt even while she said to herself: 'I'm glad he's not like the others. Glad.' She did not know why it hurt, did not know why her sobs could not entirely drown the voice in her brain that still said, 'Don't let him be blind.'

Sobs shook her to sleep at last, but it was a disturbed sleep full of strange dreams, blurred fantasies for the most part, but among them one that in its very actuality and commonplaceness was stranger than any of them. She dreamed that someone was in the room: a room like an ice-chest, white and cold. There was a burning hand that touched first her ankle, minutes later her shoulder.

There was nothing frightening about the touch and it was followed by an enveloping warmth that made her give one long shivering sob and plunge deep over her head into the well of sleep. The plunge could not have lasted long. She emerged from it while it was still night, realized that she was still wearing the dress that she had worn at the funeral, that she was lying on the white dimity bedspread — a capital offense, no doubt, in Paul Revere Square — and that she had somehow managed to cover herself with a down puff.

'I must have done it in my sleep,' she thought. 'That dream. That cold room. Then the warmth. But what waked me? I thought I heard something.'

There was a moment of silence. Then she heard it again. It was the sound of footsteps, slow steps that seemed to halt and stumble. They stopped, began again. Came nearer, moved farther away. Then came a faint sound, half-groan, half-sob. Another pause. Then again the halting steps and the low sound of pain. It came, she knew now, from Nick Joceleyn's room across the hall.

She got up and turned on her light. Her door was open she found to her surprise. That was why she had heard the steps and could still hear them. She stood by the door irresolutely for a moment. Was he ill, needing help? Or was this stifled groan, like her own tears, something that was his own business? Needing only the healing of privacy and the dark.

At that moment came the crash. She hurried across the hall and knocked at the door, felt almost unreasonably relieved as his voice said, 'Come in, please.'

'Can I help you?' she asked, and switched on the light. He was on his knees near the desk. He was still dressed. There was a wet bandage over his eyes where the dark glasses had been. A lamp with a glass shade was in pieces around him. Ink dripped from an overturned bottle.

Diana rescued the ink-bottle, went to work with blotting paper, began picking up the broken glass, all in silence.

Nick Joceleyn murmured absently, 'Mayflowers,' and then began to speak in his rapid, toneless way.

'I'm sorry to bother you. Very sorry. Codeine. I had some somewhere. Looking for it. I've been having a bit of trouble with my eyes. Cornea and iris inflamed, ship's doctor said. Gets rather painful sometimes. At night, specially, or seems so. Perhaps not — anything's worse when you have more time to think.'

He did not wait for her answer, but went on more slowly, 'You were here, you said? I wish I had been. No use to him — ever.'

'That was not the idea I got from hearing him talk about you,' Diana said quietly. 'He wanted to see you. He had planned to cable you to meet him in Hawaii. He missed you. You don't miss people who are no use.'

'Thank you,' he said, and in a voice that for a moment had resonance in it. 'It's kind of you to say that.'

Then he fell again into that feverish, toneless mutter.

'Kind. She had kind eyes — like a young fawn. But they wouldn't let her go up in the plane. Pretty sunk about it. I could tell. Plucky kid, though. Managed a smile. Told her I'd come back. Well, I have . . .'

His hand was bleeding, she saw. He must have cut it on a piece of the lampshade. He had smeared the bandage again with it. She brought gauze and surgeon's tape and bound up the gash. While she was doing so, he fell again into quick, monotonous speech.

'Knew you had to turn out of this room. Found it out. Clever, even if I can't — Did you ever hear footsteps, padding softly? Three pairs of feet, not pacing together? Like a tiger and a half trotting? To go to sleep with a tiger and half a tiger coming up softly behind — you mustn't do it, because of the claws. But here it's safe. Mayflowers . . . no tigers creeping through the mayflowers.'

The last words were hardly whispered. Then he said clearly and sensibly: 'If I had that Codeine. Burwell could find it.'

Burwell, too, had been awakened by the crash of the lamp. He appeared correctly dressed in morning coat and striped trousers with a dizzy pajama jacket of purple with green pin-wheels for a shirt. As if to atone for the frivolity of his night attire, his manner was particularly formal.

He surveyed the mess on the floor as if he suspected Diana of a clandestine game of prisoner's base, and said, with splendid calm:

'Thank you, Miss Diana. I will take care of everything.'

Diana shut the door and went back to her room.

She still felt the touch of his burning hand in her finger tips. Still heard the note of pain in his voice. She did not need to hear what he was saying to Burwell. She knew already, without being told, that he was blind. Yet even in his blindness he had not forgotten the day of the eclipse. And he had come back.

'Here is the Codeine,' Burwell said. 'Shall I send for Doctor Lomond?'

'In the morning will be plenty of time. This isn't the first of these nights.'

'I wish — if it isn't too inquisitive, Mr. Nick, that you'll tell me what's wrong with your eyes.'

'Do you really want to hear, Burwell? It's not very pretty — some of it.'

'Never mind, sir. If you'd rather not say.'

'There were those feet, Burwell, tiger feet. All over the town — behind me...'

Chapter 15

REPUTATION UNTARNISHED

NICK JOCELEYN WAS ALREADY at the breakfast table when Diana came down. His feverish look of the night before had gone. He was sitting quietly with the tanned fingers of his bandaged left hand touching the handle of his coffee-cup. His dark glasses were turned on Paul Revere Square; on the swirling snowflakes that heaped themselves on Paul's hat and along the iron railing. The lines of bitterness were more clearly etched than ever around his mouth. His chin was shaved, but he had scraped a raw place on his jaw. It had bled and he had transferred a smear of blood to his collar.

Diana saw all this from the doorway before he said, 'Someone came downstairs, Burwell,' and Burwell answered, 'It's Miss Diana, sir,' and bustled through the swing door, leaving them alone.

The feeling of pity — it had been that last night and must be the same feeling now — almost choked her, but she managed to speak calmly, quietly. He stood up, walked to her chair and pulled it out for her with his bandaged hand.

'I'm not much good at shoving it in, I'm afraid,' he said and she said hastily, 'It doesn't matter.'

He stood there for a moment. She could see him in the mirror. He was looking down at the top of her head and was smiling. It was as if he had touched her, but he moved away, guiding himself back to his place by a casual finger to the edge of the table.

'I'm sorry you didn't see the eclipse,' he said.

He was still smiling and the bitterness had gone from his face.

'Do you remember me?'

'The pixie in the middy blouse and the Rapunzel hair.' 'Of course I remember you. Have they cut it?'

'No.'

'Do you look the same?'

'No. I hope not.'

'I'm sorry,' he said gravely. 'I'd have liked to remember

That was the nearest they came to speaking of his blindness. Burwell came back then. Nick went upstairs whistling soon afterward. It was Burwell who told her what had happened to his eyes. Burwell, also, who, with much circumlocution, told her that she must have a chaperone, 'because there was no getting around it,' the Square would talk.

'I should think Hannah and Minna and Sarah would be chaperones enough,' Diana said and went down to the kitchen. She ordered the kind of lunch and dinner she thought a man would like. Hannah raised her reddish-gray eyebrows. Steak was expensive, she said. She did not hold with potatoes wrapped in pink tissue paper. Folks might do that in Idaho, she said darkly, making the tubers of that region seem distinctly disreputable. Yes, peas were in the

market. But high. She had planned on parsnips. Lemon pie was too rich for an invalid. Yes, it was true Mr. Nick liked it. Being a man. (Evidently being a man was a failing, still Hannah's tone seemed to condone it in this case.) She used to make lemon pie for him when he came home from school. But a nice tapioca cream . . .

If I give in now, Diana thought, it's forever . . .

'Peas. French fried potatoes if you don't think the others are practical. Lemon pie. And a meringue like *that*.'

She illustrated a space of about four inches and tempered her firmness with a flicker of the dimple. Hannah succumbed.

'Seeing it's for Mr. Nick,' she agreed.

Something faintly like a smile touched the corners of her tight lips, but she subdued it and assumed her usual air of belligerence.

'I'll be needing lemons, then,' she observed with the weary sigh of one by whom lemons are procured only by going on foot to California and picking them off a tree.

'I'll get some. Right away,' Diana said briskly and her feet went twinkling up the stairs.

Hannah gazed after her gloomily.

'Lemon meringue. And the funeral only yesterday. It's hardly decent. There's strange things going on in this house. Mark my words, this will lead to no good.'

The little kitchenmaid opened her wide gray eyes even wider. A delicious shiver ran down her spine. Perhaps life in Paul Revere Square, which up to this moment had failed singularly to correspond with life as she had seen it flicker across the silver screen, was going to show some of the excitement she had been led to expect in America.

'Is it gangsters you mean? Or poison?' she inquired hopefully.

'It is not,' her aunt replied, consigning gangsters and poison to a deserved inferiority with a horizontal sweep of her bony hand. 'It's worse. *It's matrimony.*'

'I think ——' began the little kitchenmaid, but Hannah informed her that she was not paid to think. Instead she could get out the flour and sift it four times.

'Will I make the pastry?'

'You will not, Bridget Concannon. There'll be no thumping with the rolling pin on this pastry. It's in flakes it's going to be that would make the snowflakes think shame to themselves.'

'I wouldn't see why. Since you've no liking for Mr. Nick.'

'And who told you I'd none, Miss Concannon from Ballyshannon? — Get me a lump of ice. It needs be the bigness of half a pullet's egg ——'

Bridget brought the ice and persisted boldy: 'Is it Miss Diana you're against, then, Aunt Hannah? Didn't I be hearing you say last night you were glad she was in it in place of that long-nosed Princess?'

Hannah was not cornered into admitting any sentimental kindness.

She saved face in the traditional way of the older generation.

'It's too young you are to understand,' she announced. 'Bring me that chilled butter off the ice and don't be pestering me. It's quiet nerves anyone needs making pastry.'

Nick Jocene made his way to the sofa under the window in his room and lay down. The snow had stopped now and there was bright sun pouring into the room, but he did not see it. He felt its warmth, though. And for a moment he took

off his glasses and looked toward the light. Hope that sometime the gray world in which he lived might brighten died hard. Evidently this was not the day. The sun made a glimmer that was not quite brightness on the gray monotone around him. It seemed to be trying to break through a thick fog, but instead of lightening his darkness it only started up the pain. He cupped his hands over his eyes and the gray darkened to black — a black that had little spurts of flame and stars shooting across it: electric signs, too, that went on and off, on and off.

At last they died down and the pain faded with them. He kept his hands over his eyes and looked into the velvet blackness. It was soothing, like the sound of cool water slipping over marble, like Diana's voice. A silver voice. From a girl hung with gold.

He saw her against the black velvet. There was a gold crown on her head. Gold dripped from her ears and clasped her proud neck. There was a wide girdle of it around her waist. Her wrists and fingers were heavy with it. (Only she had kind, clever hands and moved them lightly.) The wide gold bands about her ankles made her feet slide along slowly. Slowly. Her dress was cloth of gold. It shimmered when she moved. Little gold bells tinkled along the swaying hem.

'But not gold,' he thought, still cupping his thin brown hands over his eyes. 'No one has real gold. It came out of the ground and is buried in it again. So dress her in ten-dollar bills, then.'

He began to see her again. In green, of course. Crisp, cool green and white that crackled and rustled. Silvery green and white. Like a spring meadow with daisies in the long grass. The wind slides over it and the green waves chase each other

over the hill. There is silver on their crests. In her hands are mayflowers.

Mayflowers. His mind hung on the word. That was the fragrance, the cool, clean sweetness that hung around her as she moved. Strangely he was still breathing it here in his old room. It had no business in his room, the bare room with the black-framed football and baseball groups on the wall. Yet it was there, as definitely as the familiar things that his fingers found: the iron bed with its brass knobs, the golden-oak chest of drawers, the leather-covered couch on which he was lying.

He heard steps on the stairs. Hastily he uncupped his eyes, shoved on his glasses, stood up, faced the window as if he were looking out over the familiar clutter of roofs and chimney-pots toward the garden. He whistled cheerfully, casually jingled coins in his pocket with the fingers of his good hand. He thrust the other back into the dangling triangle of black silk. He needed the sling very little now. It served as an excuse for his clumsiness; took people's attention off his eyes.

His impersonation of a lazy, cheerful man with money in his pocket, enjoying the white-trimmed trees after the storm was wasted.

The footsteps were Burwell's as he recognized before the butler panted: 'Doctor Lomond, Mr. Nick. Shall I ask him up?'

'Yes, thank you,' Nick Joceneyn said, and then, hearing Burwell move toward the door, he added: 'Not so fast, Glenn Cunningham. A word with you. Why didn't you tell me I was turning Miss Joceneyn out of her room? It didn't matter where I slept.'

'Did she tell you, sir?'

'No, she did not, sir. The nose, one of the few pleasures of the blind, told me. She left a trail of arbutus behind her. I am blind, but a beagle. I give tongue on the scent.'

'I'm sorry, sir ——'

'Grief is unnecessary. An answer to a question or two makes all whole. When did Miss Jocene come here?'

'It would be about three weeks ago, sir. Or perhaps four. I could tell by referring to my diary.'

'I didn't know you kept a diary, Burwell. You terrify me. I hope my past is not too accurately recorded. That time I took the mince pie off the Keiths' kitchen window-sill and substituted for it a rice pudding from the Pophams. You would have been mentioning that, Burwell?'

'Er ——'

'Never mind. We can't go into all the possibilities of blackmail. Too many. What I was going to ask was, how long will Miss Jocene be staying.'

'Why, indefinitely, sir. Didn't Mr. Clifton tell you? Your uncle named her residuum legatee and it included the house which he asked her to live in and take care of the porcelain, make a kind of museum out of it. Didn't Mr. Clifton tell you, sir?'

'He may have. I remember she was made the residuary legatee. I was a little confused last evening. . . . I'll see Doctor Lomond now, if he doesn't mind coming up.'

He put his hands over his eyes again. The electric signs began to drop red and gold balls into gaudy patterns and roll them away again. After a moment of this he made a sound, hardly a groan, little more than a clearing of his throat.

He fell to whistling again:

'A wandering minstrel I,
A thing of shreds and patches . . .'

His whistle embroidered the gaiety and sweetness of the air with trills and runs.

'Sounds cheerful,' Doctor Lomond said, stumping up the stairs.

'Yes, sir, sounds cheerful,' Burwell agreed.

Doctor Lomond's quick ear caught the slight emphasis on sounds.'

'Whistling to keep his courage up, you mean?'

'Something of the sort.'

'Don't worry about him, Burwell. I'll look after him.'

'... To every passion changing
I'll tune my supple song'

went the whistle cheerfully.

'Don't worry,' repeated Doctor Lomond. 'I'll — I'll Gilbert-and-Sullivan him. He won't fool me, much.'

He puffed on upstairs toward the gay music.

Diana, hurrying through Paul Revere Square with a bag of lemons in her hand, met a trim figure in black admirably relieved by scarlet and a brace of Russian wolfhounds.

Princess Lobanov, who was in a mood of Slavic melancholy this morning, gave her niece a sad, slow smile.

Twisting a thong of scarlet leather around her wrist, the Princess addressed her companions: 'Peace, Boris. Peace, Sasha, my little darlings.'

She added some words that may very possibly have been Russian, but the dogs continued to strain on the leash and struggle toward Paul Revere's iron railing. Perhaps they did not understand Russian, Diana thought. They did not look over-intellectual.

'You shall be flogged, then, my little white angels.'

The Princess applied the end of a scarlet whip that hung from her wrist to the dogs' narrow shoulders. They seemed to understand this language and stood still, gazing wistfully at the statue and the snowy oval behind the black railing. To their vague eyes it probably looked like a frosty Siberian waste. Possibly Paul Revere's horse was a wolf. It was probably as much like a wolf as anything they were likely to encounter. There is little wolf-hunting in Paul Revere Square.

'It is lovely,' the Princess said, turning on her Slavic smile again, 'to meet anything so young, so gay on this gray morning. Oh, I know it's sunny now, after the storm,' she added, seeing a puzzled lift of Diana's right eyebrow, 'but I mean nothing so obvious. A grayness is in the heart. There's a feeling — it sweeps over me sometimes — of a brooding immensity, an intensity of appallingness, quite independent of the ordinary world.'

She put a hand of flexible steel through Diana's arm and paced along the sidewalk, looking out to the river with an air of brooding mystery. The dogs strained forward. Princess Lobanov's steps grew faster. As she still kept her clutch on Diana's arm, Diana's steps quickened too. Before long they found themselves by the river which was not in the least where Diana longed to be.

'She'll start to run, like the Red Queen,' Diana thought. 'My hair will come down and fly out behind. The bag will burst. The lemons will go rolling, rolling...'

The Princess, however, calmed the dogs with a flick of the scarlet whiplash. They gazed vaguely at the river. There were white fingers of ice pushing out into its faint steel blue. Gulls wheeled and swooped or stood, looking like chunks of ice, on the ice itself.

'To be a gull. To be free,' murmured the Princess. 'Have you felt it? That longing for wings.'

Diana said she had and made a movement to release her arm, but it was a gentle and polite movement. Consequently it had no effect, except to tighten the Princess's steel gauntlet.

'We are going to be great friends, you and I,' she announced. 'I love youth. I understand its divine discontent. I know — who knows better? — that fierce beating of the wings against the cage. To beat the wings, to thrust the thorn into the heart so that one may sing, to toss the cap over the windmill,' sighed the Princess, leaping lightly from one image to the next, 'to chase the end of the rainbow — that is youth.'

She delivered this diagnosis with such a thrusting of sharp fingers into Diana's forearm that it took some courage for Diana to say quietly: 'I suppose some young people are like that, but I'm afraid I'm a very conventional, ordinary person, Aunt Sophia, without any interesting ideas or feelings.'

The Princess gave a curious little laugh.

'It can scarcely be called conventional to welcome Nick Joceneyn — a man with his reputation — into what I believe is now your house and to live with him there, unchaperoned. Of course you do not care how it looks. But that is youth. As I was saying,' she added charitably. Her tone lost its romantic note and changed to one of finished suavity as she went on: 'Don't take this as criticism, dear Diana. Naturally your morals are of the purest, but you must send Nick away or — how stupid of me not to think of it before — come and stay with me. He's such a butterfly. He'll flit to another flower before long. Now that's settled. I won't take no for an answer. Your room will be ready this evening.'

Diana succeeded this time in releasing her arm. She looked pale as she faced her aunt, who stood with a smile on her scarlet lips, swinging the scarlet whip, with the lids drooping over her icy-green eyes.

'Uncle Nicholas wanted me to live in his house,' Diana said in a low tone. 'It's kind of you to be so interested, Aunt Sophia, but I'm afraid I can't accept. And I must be getting back. Hannah needs these lemons.'

Princess Lobanov merely shrugged her shoulders. She had an instinct for knowing when she had made a wrong move and a formidable ability for extricating herself from embarrassing situations. She remarked, 'Come, my silver pigeons,' and strolled off along the river, a picture of calm elegance.

Diana was far from calm as she hurried back to Paul Revere Square. Her cheeks had turned pink again. She kicked with unnecessary violence at a lump of snow and sent its fragments scattering over a patch of sanded ice.

The words, 'a man of his reputation,' burned in her mind and her thoughts were faster than her feet.

'I don't care what his reputation is. I won't turn him out to please her . . . A room all ready! There wasn't any room ready when Father died. Or when Uncle Nicholas died. She came and told me to run a tea-shop. It's that awful million . . .'

Had Peter told his mother how Eben had planned to 'protect' her?

'A man of his reputation,' nagged at her ears again. Once more she said she didn't care and the whole cycle spun again through her brain.

A taxi left the steps of her uncle's house — her house — and drove past her. There were bags and a square box piled

on the front seat beside the driver. From the back Nick Joceleyn's dark glasses turned their blank stare on her.

The weight of the lemons split the bag. They rolled crazily on the sidewalk. It seemed hardly worth while to pick them up, but she did. The taxi slithered and crunched its way out of the Square. Its impatient toot at the corner stung her ears. She had recaptured the last lemon — and, of course, her reputation.

Chapter 16

DETECTIVE METHODS

PETER LOBANOV HAD NOT TOLD his mother anything. He had shut himself into his studio and was painting, in a mood of exasperation, an old root that looked a little like a snake, a little like a gorilla — and a little like a root. It looked more like a gorilla when Peter finished it — a gorilla with snake-like arms brilliant with bangles from Woolworth's.

The Princess knew better than to try to find things out from Peter. Her son had a way of freezing under questioning into a sullen coldness.

The Princess had a method more efficient than goading Peter. She sent for Boris and Sasha. When the young giant in pale blue brought the dogs, the Princess talked to him for a while. The giant, a simple soul, told all he knew and did not know that he had told. It is not strange that he was in Princess Lobanov's hands a wax disk easily played with a suitable needle. But how did Mikhail, as the Princess called him, get his information?

A mystery?

Hardly.

Mikhail's name on alternate Thursdays and Sundays out, and whenever he happened to be walking the wolfhounds around the Square was Michael Connor. He came from Ballyshannon. He and the little kitchenmaid at Mr. Jocelyn's had been to school together. Although Bridget Concannon was probably the best chaperoned girl in Paul Revere Square, or in Boston, or in the United States for that matter, she did manage, in spite of her three aunts and Burwell, to post letters well down toward the end of the Square at about the same hour in the evening that Michael Connor's long blue legs followed the long white legs of Sasha and Boris toward the lamp-post on which a paternal government had thoughtfully placed an olive-green box.

Anyone who thinks that box to be of an unromantic appearance must throw away that notion and see it with Bridget Concannon's eyes as she lifts the lid, drops in a homesick letter to Ballyshannon, and then gazes up several feet into the darkly handsome face of Michael Connor. He happens — surprise! surprise! — to be leaning against the lamp-post, a splendid figure in pale blue and silver. He has a cape of blue with a crimson lining flung over his wide shoulders. The big white dogs, 'with the heads like serpents on them entirely,' to quote Miss Concannon, whimper and shiver and yank at the scarlet leash.

Michael says: 'Quiet now, Sasha mavourneen. Boris, acushla,' in his warm, slow voice, and the dogs are changed into statues carved out of snow.

Bridget has undergone a transformation, too. This is not the Bridget we saw sobbing, with her apron over her head, because her fried eggs were rated less succulent than the

soles of old sneakers. Neither is it the patient little pony who trots from ice-chest to cupboard, to stove, to table, as her majestic aunt wields the rolling pin and speaks darkly of matrimony. Aunt Hannah Concannon would have suspected the vestal virgins of frivolity. If she knew about Michael Connor and the post-box — !

This Bridget, standing a whole two hundred yards clear of the shadows of the rolling pin, is unexpectedly pretty. There is a kind of glow about her that has nothing to do with the light above her. Her eyes are always big. Even when she is crying the tears roll out without shrinking the lids. Now — Michael discovered it for the first time at the post-box — they are larger than her mouth. Her mouth is like a small Killarney rosebud. On most evenings she uses it chiefly for giggling, a pleasant soft giggle that becomes quite breathless as she remarks, 'Ah, you're a funny fellah.'

After one of these meetings Mr. Michael Connor lounges home feeling that he is not only the tallest and handsomest man in the Square, but a wit as well.

On the evening of Nicholas Joceneyn's funeral, Bridget had something more than light repartee to exchange at the lamp-post. She was 'In the Will' she mentioned casually and had heard it read. Mr. Joceneyn had left money, a great heap of money, maybe a million, maybe two, to Miss Diana. The house, too, he'd left to her, and she wanted them all to stay.

'So I'll not be going back to Ballyshannon yet a while,' Bridget said, making a pattern on the icy, sanded sidewalk with her toe. She added that Mr. Joceneyn's nephews had been drawing matches to see who'd marry Miss Diana. Mr. Burwell had sent her to fetch electric light bulbs for

Mr. Nick's room from the closet in the hall near the library and they were talking loud.

'There was nothing private about it at all,' Bridget said virtuously, 'for the door was wide open. I'm glad Miss Diana's In the Will. And she can marry the one she likes the best.'

'There's two pretty girls In the Will, then,' Michael said, emphasizing the remark with a squeeze around Bridget's plump shoulders. The squeeze was intended for her waist, but that was a long way down for Michael to reach.

'You're a funny fellah,' Bridget gurgled, and added half-heartedly, 'Keep your hands to yourself, Michael Connor.'

'What would I do that for?' asked Michael, finding her waist this time. 'I've no use for them at all.'

'Then you'll find some other use for them or I'll be posting no more letters here evenings,' Bridget said virtuously.

She very nearly meant it, too. Her legacy had given her a serious view of life.

'It's very proud you grew since you became an heiress,' Michael said sulkily, taking his hand away.

'I did not grow proud, Michael Connor. It's yourself that kept your hands in your pockets till I let fall by accident' (Oh Bridget!) 'that I was In the Will. It's what my Aunt Hannah and my Aunt Minna and my Aunt Sarah warned me. Men is all alike. If they think you've got a lump of money they're at you like wasps to the jam pot. Till it's spent, that is. I'll be wishing you a good evening, Mr. O'Connor.'

Michael growled something rude.

Not to be deprived of the last word, Bridget flung back over her shoulder: 'And if it's *heiresses* you're after, there's plenty in the Square. There's my three Aunts and Miss

Diana. Take your choice. Doubtless they'd all come running.'

In the mood of gloom following this meeting Michael was an easy prey for the Princess. She soon knew all he did — and more. Then she began on Bill Shatswell.

With Michael the Princess had nothing to go on except the knowledge that Michael sometimes met her brother's kitchenmaid at the post-box. The Princess had a habit of storing in her mind isolated pieces of information. It was surprising how frequently they proved useful. One of these nuggets of knowledge was that Bill Shatswell, at about this time of year, might be expected to be heading for Arizona.

With this recollection and the slightly erroneous information gleaned from Michael, she began her work. The Princess was too expert to count on servants' gossip being accurate. She had mentally marked three million — Michael's report of Mr. Clifton's estimate of Diana's fortune — down to half a million. But even half a million would be nice for Peter. The Princess's maternal affections were aroused and she was willing to take infinite trouble to help Peter. Even including a conversation with Bill Shatswell. What the Princess needed was information and Bill would have it. Being in his way as simple as Michael Connor, Bill would also give it.

Meeting him on the Esplanade just after Diana left her was a bit of luck. The Princess was accustomed to using luck efficiently: it is the test of greatness. Without asking a single question she discovered that the rodeos of the Southwest would not see Bill this year.

The Princess expressed surprise, but added suddenly: 'But of course I know why. Cupid. Definitely. Isn't that an arrow I see sticking out through your breast-pocket? Oh, no,

you're right — it *is* just a handkerchief, and with those too-captivating horses' heads. And the tie to match. The way you dress is something by itself,' said the Princess truthfully, and added with one of her most intimate smiles: 'You've always been a great favorite of mine, Bill, and I wish you luck. I know that sounds queer from Peter's mother. But — all's fair in love and war. Let the cleverest man win. And Peter — there's no one *like* Peter, of course, but he's not *practical*. Visionary, you know, where his own career is concerned. No — darling Peter. He'll always look on while someone else walks off with the prize.'

'Told you, has he? Thought it was a dark secret.'

'Oh, no! Peter doesn't tell secrets. But of course I've always known my brother's plans. He always used to confide in me — poor Nicholas!'

The Princess delivered this particular dilution of the truth with a faraway look across the cold river.

'So Eben was right — he *did* mean one of us to marry her. Wish you'd tipped me off,' Bill observed. 'By now I'd have a milk-white charger at the door and she'd be running downstairs on my arm in white velvet jodhpurs and a white satin coat neatly fastened with diamonds, and away we'd go, bucketty, bucketty, with a million dollars in our pockets and live happy ever after.'

'Oh, it's as easy as that, is it?' the Princess asked with one of her gayest laughs.

'Blast it, no,' her nephew admitted. 'Not with Eben drawing the long match. And him such a model young business man and all.' He scowled for a moment, and then added more cheerfully: 'But it's not long to wait. I'm second. And I don't know if Eben can warm up much in a week. Cautious customer. Eben.'

The Princess asked what was going to happen to the others if Bill carried off the prize at the end of his week.

‘Won’t my poor impractical son have even a chance? And Nick? Where does he come in?’

‘Well, Nick’s out of it. Pete drew the short match. He’s last. Not that he was keen about it, anyway. It was Eben’s scheme. We’d each have a week’s courting, he said. Then we’d each propose, but in reverse order. That means Peter can do his courting and end up in a kind of whirlwind finish with something pretty red-hot in the line of a proposal. Only he seems sort of off his feed. I’m not sure he hasn’t taken a dislike to Miss Jocene — Diana, that is. I don’t see why. Nice quiet little girl. Nothing to dislike about her. Well broken. Holds her head up nicely. Good gait.’

‘What makes you think he doesn’t like her?’

The Princess spoke more crisply than usual.

‘Well, he didn’t approve of drawing matches, and when he got his he chucked it in the fire without half looking at it. I’m not so sure it was shorter than mine. I had kind of an idea he didn’t want to cut me out. Pete’s such a good sort.’

‘Yes, he’s always been very *fond* of you,’ the Princess remarked in a tone of one admitting that her only son had leprosy.

‘I wouldn’t like to feel he was pulling his punches,’ Bill said. ‘Especially after all the trouble I’m taking. I’ve got a pretty powerful scheme — but, I forgot, you might tell Eben, or Pete.’

‘I won’t. I wouldn’t *dream* of it,’ the Princess said truthfully.

‘Well, I go to the movies every night and collect ideas and make notes on them. It’s pretty hard work, because, of

course, I'm not an intellectual type, but I always find in racing it pays to study your horse. So on the same principle I'm studying women.'

'You — you're sure you have the right authority?' asked the Princess.

Bill said he was sure. The Princess said nothing to disturb his simple faith, but asked what he had discovered.

'Well, so far,' Bill reported, 'a modified cave-man technique looks pretty good. There's the crafty angle, but I don't believe I'd be so good at that. And apparently some men still make doormats of themselves and hang around with orchids crushed in their fists.'

The Princess admitted it was possible. She strolled for a few paces and then harked back to something Bill had said before.

'So Nick's out of it. No family feeling, I suppose. No respect for Nicholas's wishes. Like John. He was always the most selfish of any of us. Except possibly Stephen.'

The Princess seemed to think family affection would make a sigh appropriate, so she inserted one here and added: 'Poor Nicholas! Queer that after bringing Nick up, he left him practically nothing. Of course he had his father's money. And a legacy was left to the mother. Quite unnecessary. How is Nick, by the way?'

'He's not well. He's — some trouble with his eyes.'

'Do you mean he's blind?'

'Oh, he'll be all right,' Bill said hastily. 'Don't say anything about it. He hates to have it spoken of.'

The Princess lost interest in the subject. Having squeezed everything out of Bill that she wanted to know, she turned back just as he was telling her something dramatic about the

Maryland Hunt Cup. She waved to him over her shoulder. He was standing looking after her with his mouth open.

‘A very lucky habit,’ the Princess observed, presumably to the borzoi who pulled so hard on their scarlet leash that their mistress’s footsteps seemed to dance behind them.

Chapter 17

SOUND MATHEMATICS

EBEN KEITH WAS CAUTIOUS. He was also thorough, systematic, and prompt. He had the business virtues and he looked on the courting of Diana as a business matter. Naturally he gave it his full attention. He did not expect to sweep his cousin off her feet, but he felt that in time she would realize his superior qualities. Now that Nick was out of it. Girls had always been fools about Nick in spite of his rattle-brained behavior. Nick's charm was incomprehensible to Eben, but he allowed for it methodically.

The period he considered suitable had elapsed. While he was waiting for Diana in Nicholas Joceleyn's library, he got out a little brown notebook and wrote down a careful estimate of his chances in tabular form.

	Bill	Peter	E.J.K.	Nick (out)
Looks.....	90	75	60	80
Character.....	0	0	100	50 (?)
Charm.....	50	90	0	100
Achievement.....	10	10	100	60
Total.....	150	175	260	290

Evidently Nick was his only serious rival. If Nick would stay out, Eben need, he felt, have little doubt of success. Diana had seemed sensible. A sensible girl would appreciate true worth if she had a chance to see it. Looking over his figures again, he decided that he had been overgenerous in giving Bill and Peter ten points apiece for achievement. What did some terrible pictures and a lot of cups won for riding horses amount to? Still he let it stand and, priding himself on his fairness, scratched out the zeros he had given them for character. After all, neither of them was vicious — only lazy and frivolous. Besides, one was a Prince and the other was a Shatswell. They were not ordinary loafers. He altered the figures, awarding Bill fifteen for getting on with his mother-in-law. To Peter he allowed — grudgingly — ten for his kindness to stray cats and old ladies.

In spite of this scrupulous fairness Peter and Bill did not emerge as serious rivals. Eben's conclusion remained unshaken; Nick was the only danger. As long as Nick held to the entirely proper idea that his blindness kept him out of the contest, everything ought to go smoothly. There was, of course, a chance that Nick's eyes might recover, but at least he was safely out of the way at present. He had left Paul Revere Square in his usual flighty way without telling anyone, even Burwell, where he was going. He was no longer a romantic figure with his dangling sleeve and his finely cut features; with his thin lips curved in a reckless smile and his eyes mysterious behind the dark glasses. It never occurred to Eben that an absent figure can be romantic.

He snapped his notebook shut and clasped his neat, cold hands behind him, then walked to the mirror and looked at himself critically. Had he allowed himself too little for his

appearance? There was the poised slenderness of his figure (and she would see him on skis if the snow held out), his alert expression, his high forehead, the keen eyes behind the rimless octagonal spectacles, the decorous glint of the Phi Beta Kappa Key against the hollow elegance of his waistcoat, the crisp angularity of his collar and coat.

'I may look like a runt to a great oaf like Bill,' he reflected. 'Even Peter is taller than I am, but I stand so straight that I look taller. And I am the type that wears well. When I am President of Joceneyn & Company . . . With a million dollars I can get control. The profit-sharing nonsense will run its course. I'll wait. I know how to wait.'

He put one lean hand, knuckles down, on the desk beside him, hooked the other thumb into his waistcoat pocket, leaving his gold key well exposed. The books on the desk, the rich glaze of the ox-blood vase beside him, the plum color and dull gold of the curtain just beyond, the dark oil painting of somewhere or other all fitted into the picture. This was undoubtedly how the President of Joceneyn & Company should look. The picture pleased him. He took out his notebook again and devoted a new page — this was no time to save paper — to making the picture a reality.

Tuesday (today) 4 P.M. Help D. J. shop for ski-equip. Be sure to ask for discount for her.

Wed. 3 P.M. Walk to Art Museum. Mrs. Gardner's Palace (if open free) 8 P.M. Call. Take 'cello.

Thurs. eve. 8 P.M. Call. Take Projector. Films. 1937 ski pictures.

Fri.-Sun. Eve. Skiing. Vermont. (Wishing Well?) If snow. (If no snow, Symphony Sat. eve. Ask mother for tickets.)

Sunday. A.M. Church. Trinity or King's Chapel. Let her choose. P.M. Walk.

Mon. Eve. Movie. Ski Chase.

As Diana did not appear, he read the list over methodically making small figures against each entry. They had better, he decided, stay at the Wishing Well. They would be automatically chaperoned by Mrs. Jones. That would save the expense and nuisance of taking a chaperone with them, or attaching themselves to a young married couple, who would very likely, Eben thought austere, be worse than no chaperone at all. He knew that plenty of unchaperoned couples went skiing over the week-ends. That was all very well for ordinary people, but Eben Keith's wife must be above suspicion.

Including gas, oil, and depreciation on the car the revelry for the week came to over thirty dollars. He raised his light eyebrows over this figure. Twenty-five had been the amount he'd had in mind. If there were no skiing it would be less. For a moment he hoped there would be no snow, but that was a wish soon discarded. It was important that she should see him on skis. Besides, she must learn to like skiing.

There must be snow. There would be snow, he decided. And he must send her flowers. After all, one should do the thing properly . . . Carnations kept well. A dozen carnations. A good bright red. Catch the eye. Plenty of asparagus fern . . . Probably a dollar and a half. Candy. Would she expect candy? His pencil hovered over the page. He decided against it. Fattening. Bad for the complexion. Post-cards of the Museum would be better. Fifty cents. He entered the amounts and shut the book.

Diana's footsteps were on the stairs.

He did not mention that she had kept him waiting. He had intended to, but her appearance distracted him. She had on the violet tweed suit and a hat that showed the bur-

nished gold of her hair. He had not noticed the little gold flecks in her eyes before or the dimple in her left cheek. She would look well on skis, he decided. Her voice was pleasanter than he remembered. It had a tone like the upper notes of a 'cello played lightly. Eben experienced a peculiar feeling just about where his ribs came together.

'Excuse me,' he said and, taking out his notebook, he wrote, 'Candy, \$1.25. Post-cards, \$1.00.'

Burwell shut the front door behind them with an air of frosty disapproval.

'It's begun,' he told Hannah gloomily. 'Didn't I say they was only waiting until a suitable period had passed? Well, young buttoned-up-pockets Eben's taking her out. And she smiling at him as if he was King of Siam.'

Hannah made a censorious noise produced by setting her tongue firmly against her lower plate and kissing the air three times. In the interest of accuracy she added that the King of Siam was a shrimp and Miss Diana would look straight over his head. Eben Keith was short, but not a shrimp. And then: 'Ogling is it you mean?' she asked darkly.

'I'd scarcely go so far as that,' Burwell, an expert in such matters, replied. 'I would call it more of a Tantalizing Twinkle.'

Hannah kissed the air again with additional violence.

'She'll never take him,' was Hannah's opinion.

Burwell's was that he wouldn't be too sure. Eben Keith generally got what he wanted. One way if not another. Burwell took from memory's upper bookshelf several volumes illustrating that useful trait and blew the dust off them. Hannah remembered Eben's habit of getting his cousins into

trouble and emerging with a halo around his own head; that he had more than once got Nick Jocelyn in wrong with his uncle. She was, however, firm in her opinion that it would not be Eben Keith who would lure Miss Diana into the dark morass of matrimony.

‘It’ll be that Peter. A Prince. And that way he has with him. It’ll be him she’ll take up with. Mark my words.’

Eben’s week of courtship was, he felt, on the whole a success. He certainly made progress. Yet at the end of the week he had a curious feeling. It was not insecurity; he still trusted his figures. It was more as if he had been walking for a week with a small pebble — hardly bigger than a piece of sand really — in his shoe. The pebble did not make him doubt his own worth, but it did sometimes worry him about Diana’s. She did not seem so sensible as he had thought. Was she, he found himself wondering more than once, really worthy of him?

That small pebble of doubt began to rub that first day. Enthusiasm for art was all very well, but Diana became so excited about Chinese pottery and porcelain that they never went to Fenway Court at all. Eben did not like changing a schedule. She said she would go every morning to the Museum and learn something. She talked rather too much about it. Eben did not have time to point out Copley’s portrait of his great-great-grandfather, nor any of the other things that his father had left to the Museum to save the family taxes.

When he appeared in the evening with his ‘cello, Diana spent a disproportionate amount of time in dragging him around the house to look at Chinese vases — as if he hadn’t seen about a ton of them in the afternoon. She showed only too clearly that she had not listened with full attention to

his rendering of Beethoven's Minuet in G by jumping up at the end of it, saying: 'Lovely! Lovely! Now just look at this hawthorn jar. I believe it's every bit as beautiful as the one we saw this afternoon.'

'Perhaps,' he thought, 'she isn't musical.'

He played his Mozart piece and the Bach one. He had intended to play *Träumerei* for an encore, but as Diana showed him another piece of porcelain, he denied her that treat. He took pains not to show that he had intended to go on. He did not look offended when she asked if he minded terribly if she turned on the radio for a few minutes. There was one of those funny question programs. She'd sent in a question and she wondered if they'd use it.

He made a note — mental, he had left the notebook at home — that he must educate her taste. He would give the radio to the Morgan Memorial and play the 'cello to her in the evenings. They would not go out much. He would have to give most of his attention to business. Of course at first they would have to entertain a little . . .

'Mr. and Mrs. E. Joceneyn Keith of Paul Revere Square entertained a number of distinguished guests at dinner before the formal opening of the Joceneyn Museum of Ceramics.' He must get his mother to give Diana the rule for mock Hollandaise Sauce. And tell her how to make chicken cutlets out of veal . . .

It was with a mind furnished with such pleasant thoughts that Eben forgot the pebble-of-doubt. Looking at Diana made the thoughts even pleasanter. There was something about the way she held her head with the rope of bright hair twisted around it that produced again that curious sensation below Mr. E. Joceneyn Keith's collarbone.

It was probably indigestion, he thought. He had hurried over his work at the office and over his lunch so that he could get away early. Luckily he had a bottle of soda mints. Indeed he always carried one — for emergencies. He took one now and felt better, temporarily.

He consumed an unusually large number of soda mints that week.

The most serious inroads on the bottle were on Thursday evening. He had planned that on Thursday he would catch up on the work he had neglected on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, and also do some of Friday's so that he could get off by two o'clock. He took his vacation on winter week-ends instead of in the summer. He always said that Boston was the best summer resort in the country. The east wind was all he ever wanted of the sea, he often remarked. As for mountains, what use were they without snow on them?

Somehow this particular report he was working on — it was an important one too — did not engross him enough so that he forgot his indigestion. Even when he pictured himself on a practice slope telling Diana exactly where to throw her weight as she turned, he did not feel completely comfortable. He was curt with young Mr. Griffin who came in to show him his new aluminum poles and to ask about accommodations at the Wishing Well.

Eben told Mr. Griffin with crisp definiteness that the Wishing Well would certainly be full over the week-end. And he took another soda mint.

After such an exhausting day it was really too much to find — on arriving at No. 37 Paul Revere Square with projector, films, and screen — that Diana was not alone. Notes from an accordion issued from the library. Someone was

playing on that plebeian instrument a tune of mournful vulgarity and embellishing it with a cascade of moaning minors. The voices, largely obscured by the imbecile groans of the accordion, wailed about 'The man I love.'

'Singing!' Eben thought disgustedly. 'And my Uncle only dead three weeks. And an accordion!' (A 'cello, of course, was different. Certainly in Eben's hands there was nothing pagan about it.)

Eben recognized Singleton Shatswell's unreliable baritone. The other voices he discovered by following Burwell into the library were Diana's and Polly Shatswell's. Diana's was not unpleasant, it had that warmth and sweetness he had already noticed, but the total effect —!

The three musicians had their backs to him. Polly was at the piano. It was only a shade flatter than the accordion, not enough to matter greatly to ordinary mortals, but hard on Eben. Polly's voice, remarkable chiefly for its ability to compete with the accordion, reminded him of a night club. Not that Eben had ever been in a night club, but he knew what to expect.

'It was probably,' he thought, looking icily at the unconscious group through his glasses — the pince-nez, for evening, more becoming — 'what is called torch singing.'

In this he overestimated Polly's talents. When Polly slid from one discord to another it was by accident. After a particularly crucial one she spun around on the piano stool and saw Eben standing grimly under the chandelier with his motion-picture equipment around him.

Diana saw him too and hurried forward smiling.

'Oh, Eben. We've been having such fun. I hope you've brought the 'cello.'

Even through his annoyance with this tactless speech, Eben felt again that twinge in his breathing arrangements.

She had on a ridiculous dress of black velvet and white fur. Her hair shone under the glare of the chandelier and her eyelashes made shadows on her cheeks. He noticed that her lashes and eyebrows were much darker than her hair.

'Actressy. Dyed probably,' he thought, but without much conviction.

There was a glow and freshness about her that made him think of clean snow in the sunlight with the shadow of white birches across it.

'I thought you might like to see a few skiing pictures I took last winter,' he said stiffly, 'but I see you're busy.'

'Why, I'd love to,' she said in that warm voice that made him forget his disapproval. 'Of course I'm not busy. Singleton will help you with the screen. Won't you, Sing?'

'I'd love to!' Singleton said in a tone that made Polly kick him, not very gently, on the ankle.

There was something about Singleton's presence that seemed to effect a subtle change on the films. Eben found himself explaining how he happened to figure in his own pictures so often.

'The best way to check one's form is to see a picture of one's self,' he said, and to his own surprise found himself repeating it a minute later in a defiant tone, as if someone had questioned the statement.

It was impossible to do justice to the film, not that Sing and Polly were noisy. They sat in silence; stared at the screen with what ought to have been flattering attention. Eben had intended to show some of the turns in slow motion so as to start Diana's education. She had said that she skied

'a little.' He knew what that meant. He would have to break her of a dozen bad habits. He had meant to begin this evening, but somehow he let the machine run at full speed and substituting for the scientific comments he had planned phrases like: 'Down the Nose Dive.' 'Jerk Christie.' 'The Get-Up-Again Club Race.' 'Spruce Mountain. Light poor that day.'

His own figure winning the Get-Up-Again Club Race seemed less birdlike than he had remembered it. The picture hadn't been taken from the right angle. The film gave its dying flickers of snow and trees and black streaks and dots. The screen was a glare of white. It was the moment when Eben had meant to suggest that Diana might photograph the race this week-end, but, instead of conferring this honor, he packed up his things and went home.

Singleton, his plain dark face looking ridiculous above the garish black and silver and flashing diamonds of the accordion, followed Eben into the hall and had the colossal impudence to ask if he and Polly could ride up to Vermont in the rumble seat of Eben's car.

Eben refused coldly, smoothly, politely. He was afraid it would crowd Miss Joceleyn. His car really wouldn't hold four with their equipment.

Singleton accepted the rebuff with one of his unexpected smiles.

'Oh, that's all right, Eben,' he said cheerfully.

He went back into the library with his large hands flashing over keys and buttons and braying: 'We don't serve bread with one fish-ball.'

Eben felt again that pebble in his mental shoe. He walked home without limping, however. Singleton, at least, was hardly a competitor.

It was just as well for Eben's peace of mind that he could not hear Singleton, as he and Polly walked home, observe: 'Well, it'll have to be the bus then.'

'Let's not go,' Polly said weakly.

'It's our duty,' Singleton pointed out. 'Don't forget we're crusaders. You promised to help. Besides, a bus isn't so bad. Bloodcurdling, of course, but so much nicer and stuffier than a rumble seat. How I hate fresh air!'

'There'll be lots of it up there,' Polly remarked.

'You can't,' Singleton said firmly, 'spoil an omelet without putting in some bad eggs — and Eben's omelet needs us in it.'

Chapter 18

COURSE LAID OUT

ON THE LONG DRIVE to Vermont Eben knew he was at his best. What other of Nicholas Joceleyn's nephews could talk of business, music, sport, all with the light touch of the man-of-the-world? Not even Nick, and anyway, 'Nick's out of it. Nick's out of it,' the chains sang cheerily through the slush on the road west of Montpelier.

Couching Lion was cut in silver against a sky of primrose. The bare trees of the foothills made a purple mist around his flanks. Shadows on the snowy field that had been pools of blue water changed suddenly to dull pewter. In the windows of a white house huddled in the lee of a huge red barn, lights pricked out.

A few miles back Diana had said, 'That's the road to East Alcott.'

There was something in her tone that made him jam his foot down on the throttle. They were safely past the road — it cut back sharply from the main road, climbed up a precipice between dark hemlocks along a frozen brook, a thor-

oughly repellent road — before he said vaguely: 'East Alcott? I've heard the name somewhere.'

'I used to live there,' she said.

There was a note of wistfulness in her voice.

For a moment Eben had the impractical notion of saying, 'We'll turn back — I suppose we can find a place for the night,' but common sense asserted itself (... the rooms at the Wishing Well would have to be paid for anyway... Caesar's wife... miss morning practice, laying out the course...) and what he did say was, 'There must be some good hills around there.'

'Yes, good open slopes,' she said.

'Queer thing that we have to come up here and teach the Vermonters how to use them.'

'Yes,' she said.

'Nice country. Some people say it's like the Tyrol. Ever hear that?'

'Yes.'

'I suppose there are winter visitors even in a lonely place like East Alcott.'

'Yes. But it never seemed lonely to me.'

There was still a note of wistfulness in her voice.

'You ought to learn to ski easily,' he said by way of encouraging her.

He spent the remaining twenty miles explaining different turns. He had already told her some of the points that would help her to photograph the race well. She understood the camera, she said. Her father had one, only she traded it for a load of wood when he was ill. She had paid the boy who did the chores with her skis. And the doctor took the car — it was pretty old but better than his — for his bill.

Eben changed the subject. Rural barter did not interest him.

'I'll spend half an hour on the practice slope with you in the morning. I'll have to lay out the race course, but I'll fit in your lesson somehow.'

Diana thanked him with gratifying meekness. He resolved mentally to make it three quarters of an hour.

This generosity proved unnecessary.

Among the feet that clumped in ski boots around the long table in the Wishing Well's pine-paneled dining-room were those of Sing and Polly Shatswell.

Singleton set down a plate heaped impartially with ham, baked beans, brown-bread, two kinds of corn-muffins, honey, jam, and cottage cheese. He almost broke Diana's hand off in his gorilla clasp.

'Sit over by the fire,' he ordered. 'Take this plate. I'll get another.'

To his intense disgust Eben found himself cramping his knees under a not very early pine table next to Singleton and opposite Polly.

'How did you get here?' he asked with more curiosity than warmth.

'Bus. All same vulgar herd,' Singleton remarked around a hunk of brown-bread.

He had visited the main table and brought back a plate differing from the first only in having Montpelier sausage added to its heaped delectability. Eben looked at this agglomeration with disgust. He ate a little fruit salad and a cracker. He was never a heavy eater and the idea of gorging himself before a race he considered insane. Yet the spectacle of Diana with her honey-colored hair melting into the honey-

colored pine, with the pink glow of the firelight deepening the pink of her cheeks and emphasizing the tilt of her nose, was not unattractive in spite of her hearty onslaught on the plate that Sing had given her. For dessert she ate butter-scotch-pecan pie.

For dessert Eben had a soda mint.

He had meant to spend the evening in further instruction, but Singleton and his odious accordion spoiled that plan. Sing had barely crammed down his third piece of pie when he began thumping out a boom-chick, boom-chick of bass chords that set feet tapping. Someone shoved the long table out of the way. Chairs went back against the walls.

‘Bet my money on the bobtail nag,
Somebody bet on the gray,’

went Sing’s long fingers.

‘Boston Fancy,’ shouted someone.

‘Doo-Da — Doo-Da,’ went the accordion.

Someone behind Eben said: ‘Miss Joceneyn, I know you can dance rings around everyone, but will you drag me through it?’

It was that ass Griffin, who had no business there at all. He and Diana had taken their places far down the room at the foot of the set almost before Eben got up from his bench. He leaned against the wall looking sourly at the dancers.

The noise was deafening. The constant tramping and sliding of feet, glass and china rattling as the room rocked, the throb of the accordion, Sing’s voice — sometimes a hoarse roar, sometimes a cracked tenor yell: ‘*Balance and swing the next below — Ladies’ chain — Down the center*’ — all vibrated too loud in Eben’s sensitive ears. The swinging figures, the girls crossing in the curves of Ladies’ Chain, the

stampede of couples down the center were a dizzy blur through which he followed Diana's figure.

It was colorless compared to the riot of bright plaid shirts around it, but its poised lightness was conspicuous in spite of the severity of white wool and dark blue gabardine. She had taken off the practical dark blue parka and the dark hat with its projecting visor. Eben had not allowed her a gaudy outfit. There had been a moment when she had been attracted to a Tyrolean one, described by the salesgirl as 'cute but dashing.' He had quenched this flicker of enthusiasm. He meant her to look from the first as if she could ski.

He glanced with disfavor at one young person who had removed her ski pants disclosing a skirt of the yellow-and-black Macleod tartan and below it a sturdy pair of legs with a baggy covering of pale blue flannel. She had also taken off her ski boots. Her feet, too, Eben observed, were covered with blue flannel. There was a collar of the same material sticking outside the neck of her yellow sweater. The same tint showed at her wrists. Eben was led logically to the conclusion that this nymph was encased in a pale blue undergarment. He withdrew his eyes from her promptly only to detect another similarly clad in a sickly shade of pink, only partly obscured by a wrinkled brown skirt and a shirt of no plaid that ever came out of Scotland.

Diana's dark, trim figure was a relief. In the small red sandals that never clumped and stamped, her feet were coming nearer at every change in the dance. He could see her hand — he had not noticed before how strong her hands looked in spite of their slenderness — clasped by that ass Griffin's brown fingers. Griffin had made mistakes at first, but she had helped him and he was now moving with enviable

assurance. He said something that made Diana look up at him and smile, releasing that confounded dimple.

'She hasn't,' Eben thought, grinding his teeth slightly, 'any business to look at Griffin like that.'

He would let her know, indirectly, of course, when he got her out in the moonlight, that Griffin was hardly more than an apprentice, taken on to please Mr. Clifton, who was his mother's cousin, and paid a salary that you could just see at a distance of three yards with a telescope on a clear day, bound to be dropped when any dropping took place.

'Which won't be long now,' Eben concluded, taking off his spectacles and polishing them with a pink cloth he always carried for that purpose.

It proved an unfortunate gesture.

Sing stopped playing with a long-drawn wail. Diana was still some distance away from Eben. She was dancing again before he could reach her. At the end of that dance he told her with icy politeness that he was going to bed to be in trim for the race. He was sure Mrs. Jones would make her comfortable. He would see her in the morning.

Eben did not sleep well at first. There was no corner of the Wishing Well into which the noise of the accordion and the vibrations of dancing feet did not penetrate. In one lull of the music he slid off into a thin sleep, but he was always half conscious of confusion. Sometime during the long night he thought he heard skis on the practice slope, but the noise blurred and he was on skis himself, gliding with the free sweep of a sea gull between poles with green-and-white flags on them each marked One Million Dollars.

Eben sank out of that pleasant fantasy into the sleep of the just.

He was the first one down in the morning. Diana had not appeared by the time he went out with the other members of the committee to lay out the course for the race. The Get-Up-Again Club has its own ideas about races. They include a little of everything and have been sarcastically described by a member of a rival organization — jealous no doubt — as being a combination of the Grand National and a potato race. No potatoes, as a matter of fact, have ever been seen on the course, as Eben often stated.

Bill Griffin, disgustingly fresh in spite of revelry lasting until the dissipated hour of eleven-thirty, was full of ideas about the race. So was Eben. Bill Griffin said the girls wanted to run the course so the committee ought to leave out the terrain jump at the end. Eben and three other members of the committee said callously that girls were of no importance. Eben had heard Benno Rybizka say that a terrain jump well done was a good way to conquer a girl's heart, so the jump was necessary.

The wrangling over the course occupied most of the morning. Eben, who throve on contention — when he got his way — arrived at the Wishing Well in a pleasant frame of mind. Bill Griffin's sulks high-lighted Eben's mood agreeably.

He would have just time, he thought, to give Diana her lesson and be sure she understood about the camera. It was a clear blue-and-white day just cold enough so that snow crystals squeaked musically under skis. It was Eben's favorite snow — fine powder over unbreakable crust. The light would be fine for photography. He could see the picture already with his figure swooping around one pole after another, his track a ribbon swiftly unrolled. Then the her-

ringbone up the little hill, the rush across its flat top, his figure dark against the sky for a moment — a geometric design of skis and bisecting poles. At last the perfect landing while the crowd still breathed a long 'a-a-ah' of satisfaction, and the glide across the finish line in the best time. It ought to be good. And Eben had drawn the lucky slip of paper that would start him first. He had noticed a little nick in it...

He had already picked out the best place for Diana to stand. He would explain about that first and show her the camera; then the lesson.

His pupil, however, was not to be found. She was not among the figures on the practice slope, nor among the bridge-players, nor in the back kitchen with the ski-waxers.

'She was here right after breakfast waxing her skis,' Mrs. Jones said. 'She asked about you, but they told her you'd went to see about the course.' Mrs. Jones hustled through the pungent odors of the back kitchen into the savory ones of the front kitchen, tested a pumpkin pie to see if its crusted amber depths would shake in the middle and added: 'Guess she's went out with Singleton. He was with her. I recollect his saying would she give him a lesson.'

'That he'd give her a lesson,' corrected Eben.

Mrs. Jones accepted the correction by saying: 'Probably,' and began chopping turkey giblets.

For a moment Eben's sunny mood of approval of the world clouded. There was a small particle of time, hardly a split second, during which a voice strangely like his own said inside his head: 'I don't really *like* that girl. She ought to have waited for me. Thirty dollars spent...' Then the cloud vanished under the glow of his morning's work. Again he

saw his figure come over the hill — the jump that Griffin had wanted to leave out of the course on the ground that some girl might break a leg.

‘They don’t have to jump. They can always sit down,’ Eben had said, ‘and you can, too, if that’s what’s worrying you.’

In his pleasure over the retort, which he would repeat to Diana later, he stopped being annoyed with her. It was just as well she was getting Singleton to teach her. It freed Eben for more important things. Probably she realized that. He put in the time thus saved in giving his skis the degree of polish that best suited the snow. Half an hour slipped by agreeably in ironing, spraying, powdering in a delicious atmosphere of lacquer and varnish richly tempered with steamy wafts of turkey, onions, and sausage.

In the benevolence of his mood he gave sound advice to those around him and several teaspoonfuls of powdered wax that he did not need to the young person in the pale blue flannel snuggies. That was what they were — snuggies. She told another ski-waxer so with what Eben felt was an unfortunate lack of reticence.

He had determined not to eat dinner tucked into any nook of knotty pine with the Shatswells. After he finished his skis he reconnoitered the position. His foresight and a donation of thirty-five cents to Miss Marie LeDuc — an unavoidable expense, duly noted in the pigskin book — reserved the only table for two in the Wishing Well dining-room. It stood in a sunny corner and looked out over the scene of Eben’s future triumph. There was the mountain’s long profile white against the blue, the nearer hills with black spruces bristling along their tops, the white twisting gash of the ski trail in the

purple haze of hardwoods, the open meadow with the bright flags flickering on the poles, the bridge with the willows, the black curves of the brook, and white face of the bare hill. It bumped suddenly out of the meadow. That devilish drumlin — as Griffin called it — was conveniently arranged for those who could jump. Those who couldn't might sit down and slide down its steep side into the lake of blue shadow at the bottom. With Eben's permission.

He ignored Singleton and with him Diana's activities of the morning. He needed all his time to explain her photographic duties. He ate sparingly. The sticky concoction of dates and nuts barely held together with dark, crumbly sweetness known as bread aroused distaste in him. Diana ate two hunks, buttered.

For an uneasy second Eben wondered if she would get fat. She showed no signs of it, but there was Aunt Bessie's known carelessness with calories. However, he could take up the subject of diet later. He paused long enough in his directions about where to stand to get the best picture of his jump to make a note in his book.

In spite of her abnormal appetite Diana proved an intelligent listener. The questions she asked about the course proved that. While she ate her pumpkin pie, he told her exactly how he intended to take every turn and slope in the race. Also why.

When he left her — he always lay down for an hour before a race and relaxed — he felt for her a warm glow of approval and thought kindly: 'All she needs is training.' He sucked a peppermint drop conscientiously. It helped relaxation and was a source of quick energy. He felt the virtuous strength of peppermint and sugar flow into his muscles.

Chapter 19

TERRAIN JUMP

EBEN WAS GRATIFIED by the size of the gallery. Even the bridge-players who so mysteriously infest skiing week-ends came out of their smoke to watch. There were several burly, silent men in mackinaws. The usual baker's dozen of red-cheeked urchins had to be dragged off the course. There were housewives in fur coats that were young when the Great War was fought, girls in bright ski clothes that thirstily absorbed snow, girls in dark plain gabardine, men in plaid shirts, or in sweaters worn modestly inside out and backwards to conceal — and yet reveal — letters and numerals.

He nodded amiably to the admiring villagers as he got into the station wagon that was to take the racers to the starting point. A little courtesy never cost anything, Eben often said. If yokels — as these yokels did — received his greeting with a blank stare of stupidity, that was not his fault.

He waved a kindly hand toward Diana. She was on the practice slope, twenty yards from the spot where he had told

her to stand. He pointed toward the vantage-point. She nodded, smiled, and held up the camera, but did not move toward the appointed place. She was laughing at something Singleton said as Eben lost sight of her.

Would she be in the right position? He mustn't worry about that now, he knew. He must relax. He took another peppermint drop and sucked it methodically. He did not let himself be annoyed by the frivolous conversation of that ass Griffin. With that ability that marks the great, he shut his mind to it.

He knew from the first second that his time was going to be fast. His skis were waxed just right. He took the turns with poised skill, hardly slowing at all. He came down out of the woods in a dizzy rush like a wave breaking over a rock. He *was* the wave, and in it, and on it all at once. It roared in his ears. Its crest threw cold spray in his face. Its power was in his arms and legs. He rode it, light, confident, alert.

The open pasture sloped below him. The impetus of his downhill dive carried him swiftly between the bright flags. There was wind here in the open. It blew sharp crystals on his cheeks, but it did not slacken his speed. Now he turned toward the bridge under the willows and the wind was behind him. He sailed with it, cutting a silver ribbon through waves of white, waves with blue hollows. Ahead of him was the drumlin with the flags whipping at the top. He lost sight of the Wishing Well with the dark dots in front of it. The herringbone up the hill went swiftly, as it had in his dream. He was on the flat top. It was harder to get up speed for his leap than he had expected, but he went at it fiercely, pushing hard with his poles.

He was in the air now, skis pointed up, poles spread at the proper angles. He was floating, flying, sailing.

Below him the crowd gave that long sigh of delight and wonder.

Was Diana getting the picture?

He turned his head, looked up at the farther slope.

The ground and the finish flags and the raw pink faces of the crowd seemed to rush up at him.

He did not reproach Diana. It was the cracked ski, he said generously, that had spoiled his landing. And of course it was the landing that had spoiled his time. Those fatal seconds while he was fumbling for his harnesses to release himself from his spread-eagle position had done it. He thought he remembered hearing the ski crack as he took off. As time went on he became more and more sure of it. No one was rude enough to ask him what cracked it. Not even that ass Griffin who sailed across the finish line ten seconds ahead of Eben's time.

Eben had wrenched his knee in the fatal spill. Griffin was putting an ace bandage on it when the girl racers drove off in the station wagon.

Eben was still in pain as he limped through the crowd looking for Diana. He would have preferred to lie down in the quiet of his room, but he felt obliged to show an unmoved face — and to explain — lightly and carelessly — about the cracked ski.

'I must have hit a rock under the snow somewhere,' he told Polly. This rock had become by repetition a chunk of white quartz, practically impossible to see under its light coat of snow. 'My ski must have begun to crack then. When I landed, it cracked some more and wrenched me over.'

Singleton said, more accurately than tactfully, 'You ought

not to have tried to look in the camera. You looked up. You lost your vorlage. You were off balance before you landed.'

Eben swallowed his wrath and managed to say quietly: 'Oh, I think you're mistaken. I don't remember raising my head.'

'We'll see when the film's developed. Diana didn't miss an inch of it. Here's the camera. Diana left it for you.'

'Left it for me?'

'When she started for the race. You were having your knee bandaged,' Singleton explained patiently. 'She's been gone fifteen minutes. You'd better be getting it focused. She's likely to sky-rocket out of them thar woods any time now.'

'She's third,' corrected Polly.

She pulled the collar of her coat up around her mouth and enjoyed a smile in the shelter of it. Also she admired Sing's ability to look like Aldous Huxley thinking about eternity. Singleton apparently noticed Eben's expression of annoyed incredulity no more than he would have a stout lady jammed in a revolving door and going around fast. Less in fact. Sing was a confirmed rescuer of stout ladies from revolving doors.

'It's ludicrous,' Eben said. 'Ludicrous.'

'But gloomy,' agreed Singleton. 'Impulsive girl. And gruesome. Very gruesome.'

Eben scowled.

'Why did you let her? You must know she can't ski.'

'How would I know that?' Singleton drawled in amiable stupidity. 'I'm no expert, but I thought she did very nicely this morning. And last night. Of course it was moonlight.'

One of the red-cheeked urchins almost choked on a lollipop and yelled, 'Here comes one! Whee-ee-ee, see her go!'

There was a black dot moving on the mountain-side. It became a black fly. Then a black bird. On the open slope it grew larger, but it stopped at the foot. After what seemed a long time a second black dot appeared. This one held to the course and crossed the bridge under the willows, appearing for a moment as a girl in a gray parka, then vanishing behind the drumlin. At last came the third figure, veering, swooping, dipping in perfect rhythm. The hood of the dark blue parka was thrown back. The sun struck on the gold of her hair as she crossed the bridge.

'You've got film left, Eben.' Singleton, who had been yelling like a Mohawk, spoke politely, as the dark blue figure slipped behind the drumlin. 'If you go over where Diana was you can catch her as she comes over the hill. Aren't you going to use the camera?'

'My knee,' Eben began, but he never finished the sentence. Singleton had already grabbed the camera with a hurried 'O.K. I'll do it. Don't thank me. No trouble at all.'

He left Eben sputtering, loped along the practice slope, and stood with the camera trained on the drumlin. The gray parka appeared above it. Its wearer came across the top, increasing her speed, but at the edge she hesitated. The camera recorded a tangle of arms, legs, skis, and flying snow that became miraculously a tall girl who picked herself up and crossed the finish line with all her limbs intact.

Eben turned his back on the drumlin and the yelling crowd. He did not see the small figure in dark blue catapult across the top or leave the ground for the air — skis, poles, and body balanced for flight. He heard that long 'a-a-ah' of pleasure from the crowd, but he did not look back.

He was soaking his knee in hot water when it was announced that Diana had won the girls' race. Even Sing did not dare to tell him that her time was only a second behind that ass Griffin's.

Eben carried it off well. When he saw Diana, he said to her, shaking a waggish finger, 'Now tell me who taught you to ski!'

'Hannes Schneider,' Diana said simply.

Unfortunately Eben, having made his roguish gesture, had turned his attention to the cup of weak tea that was his evening stimulant.

It was destined never to soothe his nerves. Some made its way down his windpipe, the rest was distributed impartially over the surrounding territory including Mrs. Jones's holly-embroidered centerpiece. Eben was dignified during the mopping-up. He did not ask any questions about Hannes Schneider. In fact he ignored the whole episode.

He was pleased with her on the drive home. Singleton had offered to drive Eben's car, since Eben's knee was so bad. There was lots of room for three on the front seat, he said.

Diana, however, had announced firmly that she would drive. Evidently, Eben thought, she wanted to be alone with him. She drove well, he noticed, for one who was accustomed to an ancient specimen of an inferior breed of car. She applied the brakes at just the points where he would have used them himself. He did not praise her driving. With Eben silence was the perfect herald of joy. However, he unbent sufficiently after a while to talk about skiing. He even went so far as to ask her a few questions about Hannes Schneider. She answered them with becoming modesty, and

added, too, that of course her winning yesterday was largely luck.

Eben agreed without giving her the trouble of amplifying the statement. He did that himself. He gave her several points as they sped through New Hampshire. Eben had skied down many of the slopes they passed: difficult places, not like the course yesterday which was pretty easy unless you were unlucky enough to break a ski, he said with a pleasant laugh.

Except for her explanation about the race which Eben accepted generously — it was, as she said simply luck — she made only one remark that he remembered.

He had been talking about a friend of his who had his own ski-tow and a cabin near Newfound Lake and she had asked, speaking rather quickly — it was not an interruption really, though he had not quite finished describing the ski-waxing room: 'What would you do, Eben, if you could do just as you like?'

The question came so suddenly that he was jolted into answering: 'Buy Joceleyn & Company and have a ski cabin on the next slope. It's for sale.'

He realized almost at once that he had been indiscreet and added hastily: 'Of course that used to be my ambition, about Joceleyn & Company, but everything's different now. I just said it without thinking. Having a ski cabin — that's my real ambition. Don't forget that,' he said, laughing.

Chapter 20

HORSES AND ORCHIDS

BILL SHATSWELL HAD BEEN THOROUGH in his studies. His book was full of notes on different methods of approach.

First on the list was the one where you said you had been misunderstood from boyhood. You had been lonely, sensitive. The world had been against you. Until now... Bill crossed that one off. A glance in the mirror convinced him that he looked too healthy. Besides, it was dangerous to pretend you were misunderstood when obviously anyone could see through you in one blink.

There was the protective angle. You called her 'little girl' and folded her tiny snowflake of a hand in your strong, manly clasp. This would combine nicely with the man-of-the-world plan in which you summoned head waiters by their first names, were wise with the wine list, and sent messages to the chef about adding just a whisper of garlic to baked oysters.

Bill felt this program also presented difficulties. He would have to get to know too many head waiters too suddenly.

And Diana might not care for a subtle overtone of garlic. He was darned if he did. Besides, he had begun neglecting his French at an early age and had kept up the good work ever since. Dallying with French menus had generally resulted in getting poached eggs decorated with morsels of old inner tubes. Also bread pudding. So out with the man-of-the-world!

He decided on the cave-man technique. He had always inclined toward it. It suited him, he felt. Unfortunately for Bill, it is easy as you slip in your waistcoat buttons — each a horse's head in aspic — to plan to be a cave-man. It's even possible as you look in the glass at your pink-and-white face to shut your mouth firmly and pretend that you are a dominant character, a tough egg, a snatcher of women off their feet.

Bill could carry the illusion right across the Square up to the moment he encountered Burwell's skeptical glance. Under that gaze Bill reverted. He blushed. He stammered. He looked as guilty as he had when he had whanged horse-chestnuts through his uncle's window. Or when he had been caught putting a lei of skunk cabbages around the neck of Paul Revere's horse. These crimes and others came back to haunt Bill as Burwell took his coat and put it away with the air of one putting a discarded garment into the Morgan Memorial bag.

The cave-man gunpowder ran out of the heels of Bill's boots. He never had enough left for even one moment of romantic masterfulness. He was never anything all that week but Bill Shatswell.

However, Diana enjoyed that week. It was restful after a week of Eben's society. Failing as a cave-man, Bill fell

back on saying it with flowers. In the language of flowers little provision has been made for moral admonitions to the recipient. If Bill meant anything more by the river of color that flowed into the house than 'Neat little filly; nice easy gait,' the flowers did not give it away. Daisies, it is said, don't tell. Neither, apparently, do gardenias or roses or violets. Or perhaps that was all Bill really had to say.

Diana discovered that it was pleasant to be spoken to like a horse. Bill would say, 'Whoa, steady there,' or 'Soo-oo-oo, easy. Take it easy!' or chirp encouragingly according to the needs of the moment. There was nothing in his cheerful silences, broken at times by occasional clicks, whistles, and mysterious equine metaphors, to imply that she was an inferior being in need of instruction. She enjoyed the morning Bill drove her thirty miles north of Boston to see his horses. She timidly offered apples on the palm of her hand according to Bill's directions and patted velvet noses. She liked the horsey, leathery flavors and saddles rubbed to the glow of old cherry wood or bits with the luster of Paul Revere silver.

Bill laughed genially at Diana's statement that horses were lucky to have noses that never needed powder. He accepted calmly her confession that the idea of hunting terrified her.

'Never liked women in the hunting field,' he observed, soothing a chestnut mare who stamped an impatient white foot and switched a short, reddish plume. 'Easy, my beauty! I'll sugar your milk for you. Soo-ooo-oo.'

He led the mare back to the stall making more incomprehensible remarks.

'My wife didn't hunt,' he said as he came out again. 'It used to be nice. Cold afternoon. Horses' feet striking sparks

on the road. Find the fire going inside. Kettle hissing. Fodder ready — English muffins. Brownies — she used to make 'em herself. The sticky kind.'

'Tell me about her.'

'She died when the kids were little, you know,' Bill said soberly. 'It's five years now. Dan's eight and Priscilla's almost seven. We live across from you with my wife's mother — Mrs. Nesbitt. She wanted the kids, of course, and she's been awfully kind, but ——'

'I'm sorry, Bill.'

'Thanks. It'd be worse if it weren't for the kids. They're good little colts. Prance about and kick and nip each other, of course. Can't expect 'em to keep their heels down all the time. Prissy's a chestnut, too. Apt to be hot-tempered. Like the mare there — Firefly. She's a granddaughter of War Admiral, by the way . . . The boy's more like me. Model character, of course.'

He smiled and strolled to the next stall.

There was something appealing about his smile, a sort of wistfulness that lighted his heavily handsome face. Diana had thought him stupid-looking in spite of his fine straight nose and high color and large, brilliant eyes. Now she found something attractive about him. His cheerfulness had a gallant quality. His whistling had in it a sound such as a small boy might make in a dark passage.

'I think it must have been Priscilla and Dan that I watched across the Square one afternoon. I was lonely and they seemed to be having a lot of fun.'

It sounded sentimental to talk about her loneliness. She wished she hadn't. She was grateful to Bill for taking it casually.

'If I turn Prissy and Dan loose on you, you'll wish you were at the South Pole,' he said cheerfully.

'I wish you would,' Diana said.

The children came the next afternoon — a plain little girl and a handsome boy. Dan was a small serious copy of his father; Priscilla red-headed, freckle-faced, skinny, with her features pushed together in the middle of her face. Her bright mahogany hair was strained back from a high, rounded forehead and braided in two stubby pigtails. There were rubber bands on the ends of the pigtails. Mrs. Nesbitt considered ribbons frivolous and extravagant. Priscilla was sensibly dressed in a dark plaid with a good deal of brown and red in it. The designer of the plaid had not allowed for Priscilla's hair.

Sitting stiffly on the edges of their chairs, the two children looked at Diana warily: Dan from under a curtain of dark lashes that left it in doubt whether his eyes were dark blue or gray; Priscilla with a twinkling hazel glance that darted rapidly about, only occasionally lighting on her hostess. Diana asked about their school and they answered with weary politeness. She told them about her own childhood, being dragged about Europe by a succession of distracted governesses. They did not relax. Priscilla's feet in their scuffed brown shoes remained with the toes facing each other. Her bare blue knees rubbed each other and her pipe-stem legs stuck out at a strange angle.

Once during a particularly bleak pause she asked politely what were the names of Diana's ponies when she was a little girl. Finding that there had been no ponies, she relapsed into silence and studied a crack in the ceiling.

There was always the device of feeding the young animal,

but Diana knew that when she had exhausted that, she would have nothing in reserve. Fortunately at this point Burwell came in with a package. More flowers, she thought. From Bill. It was a florist's box. Then it occurred to her that the string was not right. During the last few days she had had a wide acquaintance with florists' string.

It was apt to be a casual twist of jade or violet tape. This was string, disposed in an elaborated pattern of neat oblongs with strong square knots at the joints. The writing on the box was no characterless looping from a florist's pencil. It was handsome black lettering as decorative as a page of Gothic manuscript. It was drawing rather than writing with each letter standing alone. It had a peculiar look, accentuated by the fact that the 'FRAGILE. HANDLE WITH CARE, PLEASE' under the address had been smeared as if a coat-sleeve might have passed over it while it was still wet. The smearing was so inconsistent with the care of the lettering that she stood looking at it for a moment, trying to account for it.

Priscilla's voice said politely: 'Don't mind us being here if you want to open your present from Cousin Nick.'

Her eyes had the eager gleam of a terrier puppy's.

'Cousin Nick?' Diana asked, looking at the black letters. She had a feeling that she saw them being finished one at a time, patiently, then swept over by a coat-sleeve of a tweed she recognized. Why did she recognize it? She had seen it only once.

'No one writes like him. It was the same letters on my Chinese boxes nest,' Priscilla went on, and Dan explained carefully: 'She means nest of boxes. He sent me a Chinese plane. Wooden. Same as they fool the Japs with, he said.

I am making a whole squadron like it. I wish he would come and see it. I suppose,' he said, turning his handsome eyes politely away from the package, 'you are not interested in planes. So he wouldn't be sending you one.'

This delicately phrased hint set Diana untying the string. It would last longer as an entertainment if she did not cut it, she told herself. Besides, the desk shears had disappeared as scissors will. Even under Burwell's precise care the scissors-eater that lives in all houses flourished.

She told Dan and Priscilla about the scissors-eater. She almost succeeded in concealing from herself that she was incapable of the ruthlessness needed to cut through those knots that had been so neatly tied in the dark.

The box was only the outside box. Chewed-up silvery paper and tissue paper were wadded around a smaller box. Inside that was torn and crumpled Chinese newspaper. The children burrowed and clawed at it. Priscilla announced: 'I have struck something hard.'

'Let Cousin Diana take it out on account of it's fragile-handle-with-care,' Dan ordered in his slow, kind voice. Priscilla stopped her terrier worrying.

Diana took the last layer of paper away and said: 'Peach-blow!' in a tone that made Priscilla say, 'I think you like it as much as I like my boxes nest — nest a boxes.'

Diana set it on the desk, but she kept her finger-tips on its cool smoothness. That strange blend of color that has in it the warmth of the sunny side of a peach, the delicacy of a peach petal, and the coolness of spring air, blowing through drifting petals followed the graceful lines of the vase as inevitably as if they were part of it. Form, color, and texture all seemed to melt into a beauty that belonged only to this particular ten inches of porcelain.

‘There’s a note,’ said Priscilla, pouncing on it and holding it out. She made Diana think again of a terrier — a small Scottie bringing a ball with a bright-eyed, voiceless request for approval and fun.

Diana could see an arm in a sling, the fingers of the right hand anchoring the paper as the left hand slowly formed the black letters.

Dear Miss Joceleyn:

I brought this for Uncle Nicholas. As I understand you are taking care of his collection, I leave it in your charge.

Yours sincerely,
Nicholas Joceleyn, II.

The paper had been tipped a little so that the words climbed uphill. Climbed slowly, but steadily. Valiantly too, she thought.

‘Does he say where he is?’ Dan asked. ‘We wanted to write to thank him, but he didn’t put his address. Grand-mother says he’s probably gone.’

‘Never satisfied to stay in one place. So restless,’ Priscilla added in accents borrowed for the occasion from her grand-mother.

Diana, diagnosing their source, took an instant and unprovoked dislike to Mrs. Charles West Nesbitt, a worthy woman, descended from two Colonial governors; a woman who paid her bills on the tenth of every month; a patriot who heartily endorsed a special oath for school teachers (‘The pure minds of our little ones must be kept free from any taint of Communism’); a woman of acknowledged generosity.

Everyone knew how patient Mrs. Nesbitt was with Bill, who persisted in mooning around his stables. She had told him over and over again that he ought to sell the place. He was in real estate, wasn't he? Not that he ever sold any, but that was nothing unexpected, she told her bridge club. First Bill didn't sell life insurance and then he didn't sell automobiles and now he didn't sell real estate.

'Not any moss. He would *not* gather any moss, Grandmother said. What do people want moss for, Cousin Diana?' Priscilla inquired.

People who talked with Priscilla were generally driven soon to that fine old truth, 'I don't know.' Diana used it now and rang for the ice-cream she had provided for an emergency.

Burwell brought it and chocolate cakes of an adhesive sort. There were peppermints of brilliant hues concealed under the frosting. While the visitors were discovering this interesting geological fact, Diana asked Burwell whether Mr. Joceneyn himself had left the package.

'No, Miss. A taxi-driver brought it.'

'He hasn't let you know his address, I suppose, Burwell. I ought to acknowledge this.'

'No, Miss. But probably he'll call before long.'

He did not call. Bill did, every evening that week. Also most afternoons. And two mornings. Real estate, he said cheerfully, was flat. If you offered the State House with the Ritz thrown in for a dime, you wouldn't get a nibble.

He took her to a musical show that opened in Boston and that would be pretty much of a wow by the time it reached New York. He sent her a spray of orchids like butterflies lighting among bayonets of green jade. If she didn't like

them, he said, she could feed them to a horse. That was what modern girls did. He read it in the *New Yorker*. Diana said she must be a last year's model. The orchids were still fresh and fluttering on her shoulder when she made her second visit to Bill's stable. He said she'd better offer them to Firefly, so she did, but the chestnut mare rejected them with a scornful whicker.

'It seems Firefly isn't a modern girl either,' Diana said.

Bill said he was glad and that he didn't really like modern girls. It was the nearest he came to a personal remark. He turned away and the back of his neck became a deeper rose color. In a husky voice he began to talk about the children. He wished he could have them with him in the country, but Mrs. Nesbitt thought they'd grow up savages. He supposed she knew best — a man was so helpless about such things — but it seemed pretty mouldy to him to have a kid with hands like Prissy's where she couldn't ride every day. The little grasshopper was cool as a mint julep on a horse. The boy — well, he was a queer little chap, always with his nose in a book, which was, Bill said, all the more reason why he ought to be in the country. He was always getting A's in school, Bill confided in the tone of one rattling a family skeleton. He certainly needed country life.

In short, fresh air and a horse to ride was Bill's prescription for whatever ailed you. Diana did not need to ask Bill, as she had Eben, what he would do if he could do just as he liked. Obviously Bill would have the house with the framed color prints by Leech and Acken, with the stirrups for necktie-holders and the bronze horses for book ends opened and sunned and dusted. He would yank Dan's nose out of that dangerous thing, a book, and put it in safe proximity

to a horse's neck — and no holding on by the reins either. Priscilla would punch those skinny knees against a pony's fat sides. Her hair would be cut like a boy's. The terrier eyes would look out mischievously from under a touzled red thatch. She would wear jodhpurs all day and eat like a fox. Under the freckles her cheeks would grow round and pink.

Yes, a wife and a million dollars would do Bill and his family good. Diana had met Mrs. Nesbitt the day before and had found no reason to modify her prejudice against that eminent woman. To rescue Bill and Dan and Priscilla would be a piece of knight-errantry. There were moments when Diana saw herself as a slightly more domestic Joan of Arc. She only wished that being one would not mean a lifetime of offering apples to nuzzling horses.

There was a dark and scandalous secret in Diana's life. She didn't really *like* horses. She wished they wouldn't foam when they chewed and then blow at you. Their teeth always looked dangerous and there was that queer look their eyes had when they showed white. Besides, sometimes a horse stamped on your foot — though all in a spirit of good clean fun, no doubt. It was only playfulness, of course, when he switched his tail in your face or lashed out both hind legs at you.

When he remembered that someone had once opened an umbrella behind him at a certain spot in the road and bucked at that spot and threw you off, that was because he had a good memory. If your memory didn't coincide with his, you certainly couldn't blame the horse. Sometimes it was pure *joie de vivre* that made him shy and throw you into a mud puddle. But very few horses will step on you when you are down. Bill said so. And he had also specified that woman's place was behind the tea-kettle.

She saw the fat kettle coughing steam, the children anointing themselves with strawberry jam. She even saw herself picking a buttery piece of muffin off a hooked rug. The rug had a horse on it. His tail swept the arsenic-green grass on which he pranced. The picture was beautifully clear except for one thing. The shadowy figure looking into the fire wasn't Bill's. The back of his neck wasn't pink, for one thing. She went back to cataloguing camels from Chinese tombs before the man had time to turn around.

So she didn't see his face.

Chapter 21

BLACKMAIL: POLITE, OF COURSE

POLLY HAD TRIED a new lipstick. It produced a color a little like a petunia with scarlet fever. You could, she had read, change your personality entirely with a new makeup kit.

'Maybe,' said the treatise on the subject, 'HE has never noticed you. Well, maybe it is *your* fault! Have you had the infinite variety that has ensnared men's hearts from Helen of Troy to Greta Garbo? Throw away that old lipstick. Choose a scheme that will *make him see you . . .*'

Polly had followed the color chart carefully for a while, but lately the eye-shadow and the Kiss-a-Bell lipstick and the petunia nail lacquer to match had languished in the medicine cabinet. The lipstick might or might not be as advertised. She had not had a chance to try it out.

It was a mouth of normal color that she twisted into a cheerful grin as she said to Bill: 'How are you coming as a Lochinvar, horse-thief? Because Sing and I cannot stand it if you are going to act like a gentleman. Eben is full of mystery. Come on, Bill. What do you know?'

Bill looked around his mother's library contentedly.

'How nice and warm Mother keeps this house. Mrs. Nesbitt thinks a warm house is unsanitary.' He helped himself deliberately to a chunk of maple sugar with butternuts in it and at last inquired, 'Why should I give my plans away to the enemy? Sing's a rival.'

'She has refused me,' Singleton announced gloomily. 'Three times. But it's only on account of my age. She likes me best really. She said so. But she pointed out that, when I am twenty-nine, just at a man's most attractive period, she'd be thirty-three. Well, she has something there. It must be pretty mouldy for a woman to be thirty-three.'

Bill ate more maple sugar and made no comment.

'Come on, Bill, stop looking as if you knew who'd win the Grand National. We only want information so we can help you.'

'Sudden philanthropy,' Bill observed.

Singleton explained that he had given up hope, but that he and Polly wanted to keep Diana in the Shatswell family and to that end they had formed the Shatswell Protective Association. And Bill was practically twenty-nine — that devastating age. Distinctly worth helping.

'Eben's twenty-nine,' Bill remarked.

'Ah, but we have taken measures. The Shatswell Protective Association has dealt with Mr. Keith. *Et comment!*' Singleton said.

'We chaperoned them,' Polly added. 'It nearly killed us, feeling as we do about winter sports, but we didn't neglect our duty. Come on, Bill. Tell us how you're getting on.'

There was an urging in her hazel eyes that contrasted oddly with the lightness of her tone.

'Afraid she hasn't much use for me,' Bill said.

'Oh, Bill, and after I got chilblains for your sake. And Sing and I spent all our money on that ghastly week-end! You don't mean she likes *Eben*? Not after he made such an exhibition of himself.'

'How?'

Polly and Sing told him. The story lost little in the telling.

'I don't see,' Bill observed, 'that you two did so much. He seems to have done nicely about dishing himself without your help.'

Singleton admitted that Eben might have done well unaided.

'But we annoyed him. The mere sight of us set his thumbs prickling. And I played the accordion till my shoulders ached. He hates that. I looked at him with that cynical leer of mine that is so much admired. Under my gaze he was bound to assert his superiority. And it was me that kept Diana from telling him that Hannes Schneider taught her to ski when she was a kid in Austria and that she'd spent the last eight winters gliding down the sides of houses and balancing on skis on church steeples. I told her to surprise him. It did. Of course I hoped the shock would kill him. Can I help it if his arteries are made of rubber? Come on now, Bill. Courage, my old one. We'll help. Subscribe to our service.'

'I have an idea she likes Peter,' Bill said.

Polly asked: 'Oh, do you think so?'

She ran her hand through her touzled brown hair and straightened her spectacles. She had her usual impudent grin as she took her hand away and added: 'You wouldn't

give up without a struggle, would you? Never say die! Shatswell forever.'

As Bill continued to exhibit a gentlemanly reserve, Singleton asked: 'Don't you want our support, then? We might as well tell you that those who do not subscribe to our personal service will have a lot of our society. Eben can tell you what chaperones we are.'

'Blackmail?' Bill inquired.

'Of a refined type. But sinister.'

'What are you two supposed to get out of it?'

'You can't seem to understand patriotism,' Sing complained. 'We just want to keep her in the family. Of course I'd expect to usher at the wedding. And I'd be glad to give any help I could about picking out the ushers' presents. You were always generous, Bill. I'll say that for you. In your lethargic way.'

Polly did not say what she hoped to get out of it. Bill thought there might be something. In fact as he remarked, 'Peter's a Prince, you know — that's quite an asset,' he thought he knew what it was. He left them with the pleasant feeling that he had learned more than they had. He had no intention of telling his plans to two such talkative relatives as Sing and Polly. Even if he had any plans. He was not sure yet whether he had. He had an uneasy feeling that Diana didn't really like horses . . . Anyway, this was Peter's week.

Peter had not been making the most of his advantages. The first three days of the week that had been allotted to him for making Diana acquainted with his charms he had spent painting an ash barrel. It was a new barrel of dappled

silver. Peter set it in front of a piece of Venetian brocade. He put a cast of the Venus di Milo beside the barrel. She was just tall enough to look wistfully into its depths.

Three civilizations, he was going to call the picture. The ash barrel with its cleverly pleated sides represented the twentieth century. It was much harder to paint than the statue or the patterned richness of Renaissance weaving. He was just beginning to get the shadows in the corrugations as he wanted them when his mother paid him one of her rare visits.

She had her usual effect on him. The picture had seemed to have a certain cleverness until she looked at it. Under Princess Lobanov's amused gaze it became only another unsuccessful experiment. While she was looking at the canvas he remembered the way she used to say, 'What's that?' whenever he brought her something he had made for her. Whatever he held in his hand used to return to its original elements — so much crayon and paper, so much wood and glue.

Once on her birthday he had had an inspiration. She used air-mail stamps — lots of them. He would make her a box with a plane on the cover. It took a long time to make it. He couldn't seem to deal with wood. The sides came unstuck, and when he tried to nail them, the wood split. He turned to cardboard and surgeon's plaster. After all, the plane was the important thing and the plane was good.

He painted the fuselage silver and the wings lacquer red. It would look nice on her silvery writing-table. He bought three air-mail stamps. He got a little paint on one because the wings of the plane were not quite dry. He would have bought another, but his allowance was gone.

He could feel again the eagerness with which he went to her room with the box in his hand. The plane was only the least bit sticky. It looked poised for flight. His grubby, painty fingers felt hot as they held the box.

Then his mother's cool, keen glance fell on the thing in his hand and she said: 'What's that?'

He never answered. He put it down on her desk and went quickly out of the room. She was thanking him, but the moment had gone. It was the last thing he had made for her. He found it in the drawer of the desk years later. It had been tossed into a box of odds and ends. The stamps were still in it. The one with the smear of red paint was at the bottom where he had put it. She had never seen the spot, he felt sure.

He turned away from the ash-barrel picture and began to wash his brushes. Futility hung around him like a cloud. He knew suddenly that he would never be a painter.

His painting had seemed a possible door of escape. No business had a place for his inexperience, for his reputation for ease and idleness. Even the scrubby little department store in New Hampshire where the man wanted a partner didn't want him. He had kept on painting long after he had known he was fooling himself. Suddenly, as his mother stood looking at the glittering ash barrel, he knew that door was slammed in his face forever. He would never get out by that door; never get out at all. Never come home to a small, neat house, smell supper cooking, find Polly . . .

He turned the canvas against the wall and folded up the easel. His mother sat in a carved and gilded chair and watched him lazily through little puffs of blue smoke. She made small vague remarks about nothing in particular.

Her voice was pleasant and soft. It was like a cat purring comfortably because she has not yet made up her mind where to scratch.

Princess Lobanov, of course, was in possession of most of the news of Paul Revere Square, but she had not quite decided how to use it, so she continued to smoke and drawl and watch her son as he moved about the big handsome room. He was haggard and tight-lipped in the candid north light. The Princess, seated in one of the dimmer corners, looked decorative in a green velvet tea-gown. It had sable at the neck and at the cuffs of the full flowing sleeves. A barbaric belt of gilded leather and glass emeralds and rubies held the folds around her admirably slender waist. If Cossacks wore tea-gowns, this would undoubtedly be the correct model. Seen through the smoke, with the slight smile twisting her scarlet mouth and narrowing her long green eyes, she looked more Slavic than the last Prince Lobanov. He had been a dusty blond man with a square, blank face. At least Peter remembered it as blank. He had never seen his father either drunk or angry . . .

The Princess told some of her stories from Washington. She knew them all. Humor. Malice. Half-truths. Lies — plain and fancy. She told Peter the cleaner and funnier ones. The transition to taxes was easy. She was naturally worried about taxes. A pathetic case. When her income began to increase from her brother's legacy, the tax would be outrageous.

'And this year my debts will take what's left,' she said calmly, watching a puff of smoke turn blue and gray and fade into the haze. 'It's tiresome. I'm so sorry, Peter, that I shall have to stop your allowance.'

She sounded about as sorry as if she had said: 'I'm so sorry, Peter, that there is no bacon this morning.'

'I'm sure you'll soon be making something by your painting,' she went on in the same light tone. 'You're doing splendidly. So clever. And improving. Definitely.'

'I've given up painting.'

Peter's voice trembled on the last word. He meant it to sound casual; knew furiously that it had sounded merely petulant.

'That seems a pity after all that's been spent on it, but of course you are your own master,' Princess Lobanov said with an enraging tolerance that drew from her son a bitter 'I'm not and never have been. You've seen to that.'

His mother knew that anger is an expensive luxury. She did not indulge in it, but simply dropped her eyelids languidly and asked: 'Aren't you — neglecting an opportunity? For independence — rather an unusual one? Or — I'm doing you an injustice. Stupid of me! That's why you've given up painting! That's clever of you, really clever, Peter. She must have had enough painters, having lived with Stephen. I think it's a good move, Peter. Definitely.'

'What do you mean?'

Peter's voice was hoarse. He started across the room, stumbled over a color-box that opened, spilling tubes under his feet. Cobalt blue and alazarin crimson squirted over the silvery floor.

He strode through it and stood over her.

The Princess opened her sleepy eyes and looked him over from his white, tense face to his white shoes with the red and blue smears on them.

'Don't be violent, Peter,' she drawled. 'You hurt my wrist badly the last time you lost your temper.'

He shrugged and turned away. It was futile to be angry.

'I can't think,' he heard her voice going on, 'just why you are so excited. You've known, of course, that I couldn't keep up your allowance forever. With no expenses except your clothes you must have been able to save a nice little nest egg,' the Princess said, generously attributing to her son a virtue that she admired in others — if they didn't mention it too frequently. With equal generosity she added that she had intended to give him something out of Nicholas's legacy, but Peter would, of course, understand that it was impossible. 'And all I really came up for, Peter, was to ask if I might not better invite Diana to dinner tonight. I want to help you, Peter. In your struggle for independence.'

All he could say was, sullenly, 'I shan't be here.'

Princess Lobanov stood up. She still looked languid, but her voice sharpened.

'It would have been pleasant to settle this in a civilized way,' she said, 'but since you will have it straight out, here it is. If you don't try to marry this little country cousin — who seems to me quite an agreeable and attractive girl — you will find yourself in a very awkward position. I shall sell this house. I shall no longer make a place available for the painting of ash barrels. I shall leave you in my will perhaps a thousand dollars and my best wishes. Nothing else. You don't amuse me, Peter. My appetite for sulks and ingratitude is limited. I shall be delighted for you to be independent. I point out a pleasant way.'

Peter muttered: 'And of course she'd snap up anything you threw on the ash heap!'

His mother said dryly: 'You have always known how to make yourself agreeable — in public. I scarcely consider Bill

Shatswell and Eben Keith serious rivals. If she does not take you, it will be because you don't try. I might, of course, help you — speak to Follingsby Clifton. That would be suitable — since she has no father.'

Peter growled: 'Keep out of it, will you?'

The Princess agreed to keep out of it. She took the request as evidence that her method of dealing with her exasperating son had been successful. Apparently it would serve as well to make a suitable marriage for him as it had before in preventing a calamitously unsuitable one. The Princess was not elated. She had never really doubted her ability to handle him.

Chapter 22

THE LISTENER

WHEN THE FIRST LIGHT crept into Diana's room it would fall on the peachblow vase. She would lie and watch it change from a silhouette dark against the dawn to a shape of misty gray and then gradually warm to its own mysterious blend of sunrise colors. She could never be sure just how it was going to look. It was as shifting as a rainbow. Yet there was stability about it too — in the fact that it was always there; in its inevitable flowing grace.

She had not outgrown her country habit of getting up with the sun. Burwell would find her in the library working over her catalogue cards when he came in to announce breakfast. Each card had a number that corresponded to one stuck on the bottom of a piece of pottery or porcelain. On the card she wrote where the piece was kept and a description of it. Sometimes she tried to identify it as Ming or Khang Hsi, but the more she visited museums the less she knew. The museums had great treasures of knowledge, but they were inhabited by a race that breathed a special

air; spoke a special language. They answered her questions with courtesy, a weary courtesy, a tender and tolerant courtesy like that with which Confucius might address a two-year-old child, but their replies consisted so largely of reservations, evasions, elaborations, and long hard words that she came out by the same door that she went in, knowing less than ever.

Her remarks on the cards came to read something like this: 'A bowl of a kind of soft pale green that has a misty clearness to it. There are some white places on it that make one think a little of the tops of waves, or they might be mountain peaks with snow on them in moonlight. I would call it celadon if I dared call it anything. It is quite shallow. It measures ...'

She was very precise about the measurements and she photographed each piece and filed the picture with the card. That was Peter's suggestion. He had lent her a camera, had left it at the house with instructions about using it while she was in Vermont. Either his instructions were incomplete or she did not follow them properly. Some negatives were as black as a stovelid; others had nothing on them at all. It was an expensive camera to feed and her ready money was running short. It was taking a long time to get the will proved and settle the affairs of Joceneyn & Company. Mr. Clifton paid the servants' wages and the household bills. It did not, apparently, occur to him that Diana might need money. And it never occurred to her to ask for it. She supposed she would have some sometime. Probably it was not really taking Mr. Clifton a long time to produce it. It was, she reminded herself, only a matter of weeks.

And this was Peter's week. Singleton had told her so. It would be Peter who would keep the telephone and the doorbell exercised. Peter who would send her flowers and take her to the theater. Or would he? Peter didn't do things like other people. Perhaps he'd be original.

He was.

Monday. Tuesday. No sign of Peter.

She was annoyed and ashamed of her annoyance. After all, there was no law that Peter had to spend this week or any other week in her society. Perhaps Peter was so original that he wasn't interested in a million dollars with a wife glued to it. Perhaps Peter — surprisingly — concealed a backbone under his Russian blouse. The idea ought to have pleased her. Somehow it didn't. She found herself listening for the telephone and was irritated with herself for listening. Singleton said Peter had gone to New Hampshire the week before, but surely he'd be back by now.

Her Wednesday morning's photography was all done with the slide left in, as she discovered when she removed the expensive film pack from the back of the camera. The young curator of porcelains hurled the film pack into an open fire where it burned with a hot celluloidish smell that brought Burwell into the library sniffing.

Did Burwell know that this was supposed to be Peter's week? Of course. Everybody knew everything in Paul Revere Square. She was sure that her Aunt Sophia, whom she had met on the Esplanade the afternoon before, looked at her with a new interest. The Princess evidently knew that Peter was supposed to be bombarding the door of No. 37 — and wasn't. Had he told his mother? Diana hardly thought so, but she realized she knew nothing about him.

Perhaps it was part of a scheme to arouse her interest. That thought deepened the color in her cheeks and made her eyes darken suddenly.

'Yes, she's actually lovely. In her style. With training ...' thought the Princess. Aloud she said: 'I've been thinking, Diana. Even though Nick has gone — and that was so wise of you to send him away — I still feel you ought not to stay alone. I know there's no harm in it, but "avoid the appearance of evil," I always say. So why not — unless you have some friend, an older woman who would stay with you — why not come to me? Silence the tongues. Absolutely.'

Afterward Diana was surprised at her ability to lie so suddenly. Annoyance at being told again that she was subject for the tongues of the Square, rage at the idea of being shoved down Peter's unwilling throat, released an unsuspected power.

'Thank you, Aunt Sophia,' she said politely, 'but I have a friend coming to visit me, so I couldn't be away just now.'

She went home exulting in her new-found talent for the lie defensive. It was not until the next morning, just before she threw the film into the fire, that it occurred to her that she must make her mythical visitor into a reality. She knew that Princess Lobanov could not actually drag her kicking and screaming across the Square into her Blue Grotto, but it would be awkward when her aunt found that Diana had looked her in the eye and lied. Diana was such an inexperienced liar that she remembered about being one. The best way, she decided, was to make the lie into the truth.

Only how? Diana didn't know anyone to invite. Polly? She was hardly a chaperone and lately something seemed to

have happened to their friendship. Polly was still polite and kind, but there was something forced about it . . . Bertha Wilbur? But Bertha couldn't possibly leave the farm and the store. Who would wash the separator and fry doughnuts and make cookies for the Parent-Teacher Association, and sing in the choir and sort the mail? A whole army of talent would be needed to get Bertha out of East Alcott. It would take weeks of planning. Perhaps she could come after sugaring, but Diana needed a visitor *now*.

It was at this point in her reflections that she discovered her photographic catastrophe and pitched the film pack into the fire.

Burwell, having assured himself that there was no arson going on, said: 'About that pink vase, Miss?' Burwell said 'Vahz' with the ease of long practice, an ability Diana envied him. He would have been at home in a museum, except that he was rashly definite. To come right out and say pink!

Burwell continued: 'You spoke of acknowledging it. I have ascertained Mr. Nick's whereabouts. You can reach him through this number.'

Diana took the slip of paper he held out. She said: 'Why, Burwell, how clever of you! Why, you're a detective — it's marvelous!'

Burwell often said to Hannah that Miss Diana was too enthusiastic — for a lady. A lady ought to be — well, not contemptuous exactly, but a bit more wooden-like. He thought he ought to speak to Miss Diana about it, but somehow when the occasion arose, he never had the heart.

He beamed now and said with a modesty patently false: 'Why, it was nothing, Miss. Nothing at all. I simply

telephoned his mother's until I succeeded in establishing communication with her. It appears she has been absent from town.'

Diana was looking at the piece of paper with the address and telephone number on it . . . Bulfinch 7770.

She said slowly: 'I'm sure I've seen that number before. Those three sevens. It struck me at the time . . .'

She turned to the desk, fumbled in a pigeonhole, brought out blotters from philanthropists, a picture post-card of Wilbur's General Store, East Alcott, a cartoon of Dahl's about a gentleman who spent an hour waxing his skis and then slid downhill sitting (What *could* Sing have meant by sending her that?), and, at last, a clipping torn from the *Transcript*.

Would you like a Listener? . . . Troubles . . . trip abroad . . . golf game . . . Call Bulfinch 7770.

'Look at this, Burwell,' Diana said, holding out the clipping.

Burwell read it solemnly. He seemed to find nothing peculiar either in the offer to look at amateur motion pictures — at a slight extra charge — or in the coincidence about the numbers.

Diana had to point it out to him.

He still refused to be surprised.

That was, he admitted, Mrs. Rowe Joceneyn's number. It was also the number of THE LISTENER. Only he saw nothing remarkable about it. Mrs. Joceneyn was, in fact, The Listener. She also ran the Help-a-Bit Shop which Miss Diana might have noticed advertised. Her service was most helpful. She would have one's dog washed. Or one's curtains.

Arrange the flowers for one's wedding. And remember one's divorced husband's sister's birthday. Or so he understood.

'Mr. Jocene employed her in many ways such as arranging flowers for dinner parties and Christmas shopping. She would accept nothing from him. Except in the way of business. A very remarkable lady, Mr. Nick's mother. If I may say so.'

Diana wondered what movie Burwell had seen the night before. He was always particularly butlerish after an evening of Park Avenue celluloid. She asked him to call The Listener and make an appointment. For that afternoon if possible.

Burwell noticed that Miss Diana looked different as she spoke. There was a kind of shine about her. If you know what I mean, he told Hannah.

Hannah knew what he meant and took a dark view.

'It'll be that William Bradford Carver Shatswell she's taking, and it's planning the wedding with Mrs. Jocene, she is,' Hannah said with prophetic gloom. 'The girls that are in it these days are very frivolous and light. Lemon pie for Mr. Nick one day. Lady Baltimore cake for Mr. Bill the next. It's not decent hardly.'

Burwell pointed out that some weeks had in fact elapsed between the lemon pie and the Lady Baltimore cake. This statement did not confuse Hannah in the least. She merely recalled that in between these had been caramel (pronounced carmel) ice-cream for Mr. Eben.

'Which I hope it puckered the prim mouth on him. It's light behavior, Mr. Burwell. Millions or no millions, I don't set up to be better than others, but this I will say, I was never light. They could keep their millions, but I'd never be light. No one can throw that in my face.'

No one did, and she immersed herself in preparations for a chocolate soufflé. Although Hannah would have been the last to admit it, cookery had a new charm for her lately. The talents of Miss Bridget Concannon of Ballyshannon were employed in scraping carrots and massaging the bottoms of saucepans with a wire brush.

Miss Concannon had undoubted gifts in these fields. She exercised them somewhat sulkily.

The Help-a-Bit Shop was at the top of a tall house. Those who had the courage to climb the four flights of dark, steep stairs were rewarded by a room full of sunshine and daffodils. Outside, the river showed blue silver between the chimney pots.

Apparently business was not brisk this afternoon. The door was open letting sunshine and a fresh breeze and a sound of whistling into the stuffiness of the hall. A girl in a green dress was standing with her back to the door and her dark head thrown back. She was directing trills and runs and liquid cadences at a canary who surveyed her cynically between gilt bars and answered with an occasional dry, bored chirp.

The whistler was also inspecting papers and throwing them at a wastebasket that had ceased to be big enough. The drawers of the desk stood open and they were empty. The girl, after imitating a song sparrow, a hermit thrush, and an oriole in the final burst of melody, slammed the drawers shut and spun around, putting her arms up and changing her whistle suddenly into a yawn. Her eyes were shut tightly, but still showed a fringe of dark lashes. Her black hair was cut square across her forehead and curled

unnaturally but pleasingly around her ears. Her teeth, as Diana had ample opportunity to observe, were perfect.

It was a surprise when she opened her eyes to find that they were a pale gray blue, like larkspurs in a mist. It was also a surprise to the owner to see Diana.

'It's what I *would* be doing when we've a new client,' she announced. 'It would be grand if you would excuse me. We're all torn up, as you see. We're being evicted.' She pushed some papers off a chintz-covered chair and added: 'Sit down, won't you? I'm Clare Desmond, Mrs. Jocene's secretary. She's still listening to her last client, but there's only five minutes to go.'

The client's voice came faintly through the door beside the fireplace. No words could be distinguished, but from the monotonous clack and whine Diana deduced that the owner of the voice must be having a thoroughly good time. So few people who both whine and chatter ever find a listener.

'We've been having a splendid week,' Clare Desmond announced. 'It's a shame we have to move, just when people are finding their way here. That's the worst of being tenants-at-will. They're going to tear this building down. We've known it these three months only we didn't think it would be so soon. What with the depression — no, it's recession I mean — and all. But today in bobs a large, pink young man and solemnly tells us we've a week to get out. I told him we eat and sleep here — everything except the birdcage and the wastebasket folds up into something else — but he'd no mercy on us. I asked him to find us another place, but he hasn't. He's a realtor,' said the girl in green, as if that explained everything.

She played the typewriter swiftly with her long fingers.

The noise pleased the canary. He looked toward it with eyes like the heads of black pins and broke into a hymn of approval. The voice of The Listener's client continued its faint minor chant. Clare Desmond took the paper from the typewriter. Its papery crash was part of a concluding chord in which the client's farewell, the shutting of a door somewhere along the hall, and the canary's final cheep all combined.

Then the inner door opened and Eleanor Jockeyne came through it. Before she spoke, Diana realized why people liked to talk to her. She had a listening look in her clear blue eyes; kindness and alertness too. There was something crisp about her — not only a matter of silvery hair and starched white frills, but a precise neatness of movement. Yet her voice was as Diana remembered it on the afternoon of Nicholas Jockeyne's funeral: a gentle voice with a soothing rhythm and a variety of notes, as different from the typical voice of Paul Revere Square as the canary's trill was from the clack of the typewriter.

'I'm glad you've come. Do you mind wading through those papers? Come into my room where the hurricane hasn't struck yet,' she said.

The words were simple enough, but the voice lent something charming to them.

The inner room had a delightful air of peace about it. A fire of cannel coal was snapping, sizzling, and splitting in the small grate. Above it Audubon's Arctic tern swept on swift wings against a blue-gray sky, piercing the air with its rose bill. On the opposite wall Rockwell Kent's deer bounded over blue-shadowed snow below bare trees and the sunlit peak of Equinox. There was a cracked Lowestoft bowl full

of tulips near the sunny window. There were two comfortable chairs. In the slightly shabby depths of one of them Diana felt suddenly that she belonged where she was. It was a long time since she had felt like that.

Mrs. Jocelyn picked up a piece of embroidery and began to work on it. The pattern seemed to belong to the period when good William and Mary together came on. It was a curtain for a friend of hers who had the character to keep her house all in periods, she said. It took a lot, she added, not to let Queen Anne and Queen Victoria into the same room. Apparently the results would be serious — spontaneous combustion or something.

She put a blue-green stitch next to a green-blue one and was silent. Her hands seemed to move slowly, but the pattern grew. Looking at the scrolls and leaves and improbable flowers, Diana forgot just why she had come. Eleanor Jocelyn did not ask her. Diana hardly knew just how she happened to be telling about her weeks in Paul Revere Square: how she had cooked the eggs; how she and her uncle were friends; how his death had changed her from being totally uninteresting to all her relatives, to being entirely too attractive; how she had been lonely and was now lonelier than ever. Even Polly Shatswell, who had seemed to like her at first, was stiff and cold to her now. Probably that was because Polly didn't want to have Diana think it was on account of the money she was friendly. It might be a dignified attitude, but it was an uncomfortable one to meet, and it didn't help the fact that other people who hadn't liked her before were now so pleasant; or that she herself had become suspicious of people and hated herself for it.

There was something almost hypnotic in those moving

fingers and in the clear, blue eyes that sometimes left the pattern and met hers. Listening, Diana realized suddenly, is not a passive state. There was nothing inert about Eleanor Joceleyn's listening. Eyes, after all, are doors, and like doors are used for two purposes — going in and coming out. The clear blue light turned on Diana was a two-way sparkle. It received ideas and sent the answers all at once.

'Lighthouses. Some people are lighthouses,' she found herself thinking in a moment of silence. The silence itself was part of the charm, just as the spaces between the Arctic tern's wings were part of the pattern. There was no compulsion to speak, unless you wanted to. Usually, impelled by the comfort of the moment, by the warm sense of being liked and understood and the occasional soft-voiced comments, you wanted to.

During one of those restful pauses a pleasantly preposterous idea occurred to her. She stumbled in expressing it, but apparently she spoke effectively, because after a little discussion Cousin Eleanor — she had suggested that name as the solution of a difficulty, since what relation, after all, is a half-uncle's divorced wife? — accepted the invitation. The evicted Help-a-Bit Shop was to move itself — its turquoise-blue filing cabinets, its Audubon tern and Rockwell Kent deer, its couch that was really a bed, its copper teakettle that whistled like a canary, its secretary that whistled like a thrush, and its canary that whistled like — well, like a canary — to Paul Revere Square.

Diana felt like dancing all the way home. She was going to be respectable. And she was going to have a good time: circumstances not always compatible. Furthermore, she was going to annoy her tall aunt, the specialist in etiquette,

and her stiff aunt, the philanthropist. As to her broad aunt, the domestic character, she did not care about annoying her. Aunt Bessie was a treasure, in her overstuffed way, but Diana would not marry any of her aunts' sons. She would be a rainbow in Paul Revere Square. There would be a pot of gold at her feet, but no one would find it. They might pursue her but —

The idea of pursuit brought her up short. She had been pursued enough. People from outside the family had been joining in lately as if it were anyone's fortune hunt. Young Mr. Griffin had become importunate, in a vague and chivalrous way, of course.

There were others, too. Eben ought not to have let the Get-Up-Again Club see her. They did not notice the mental No Trespassing signs he had hung up around her.

Perhaps, Diana thought, it would be a good idea to be engaged to someone. Temporarily. That would choke off the others. Not to Bill, because it would hurt his feelings when she disengaged herself. Not to Eben, because a weekend had been enough.

'I will,' she announced to herself airily, 'be engaged to Peter.'

She could not attend to the engagement at once, she realized. She had a lot to do. She must, for instance, break the news to Burwell that the Napoleon's Tomb reception room was going to be the office of the Help-a-Bit Shop. The bright blue filing cases would cheer it up a lot. So would the canary, whose name was Baron Munchausen. So would Clare Desmond. Especially Clare Desmond. Clare was delighted about moving into Paul Revere Square. She would sleep, she said, in a filing case, or in a tall clock, if necessary.

Diana said it wouldn't be. She gave a pleased chuckle as she thought about Clare. She had plans for her. This was a wonderful day. All her plans had an aurora borealis quality. They flashed and glittered and there was a new one every minute. She turned reluctantly from the latest inspiration and began to think about making Mrs. Jockeyln — Cousin Eleanor — comfortable.

Mrs. Jockeyln had better have Mr. Nick's room, Diana told Burwell, and left him to break the news to Minna. Luckily Burwell approved. He never even scowled over the idea of Clare Desmond's arrival and after all that made three in the family.

He said benignly: 'It's what I often said to Hannah, Miss, a chaperone is imperative, I said. And you couldn't have made a more appropriate selection.'

'I believe you said Mr. Nick's room, Miss?' Burwell added in his Park Avenue manner. 'Pardon me, Miss, but won't Mr. Nick be using it? I inferred that with his mother here ——'

'He's in the hospital, Burwell. Mrs. Jockeyln told me. His eyes are very bad. There's an operation they may do later, when he's stronger, but it will be a long time before he can leave.'

'Nevertheless, Miss, I think Minna had better prepare the blue room for Mrs. Jockeyln, which she occupied it before, and the pink room for Miss Desmond. With your permission, of course.'

Diana gave her permission. Burwell suggested flowers for the table and confided the name of a florist, not the nearest, nor the most expensive. But a reliable man. Mr. Jockeyln had patronized him. He had an account there.

‘An account,’ Diana said, ‘would be a help.’

‘Are you short of — er — currency, Miss?’ Burwell asked in the tone of one turning aside from an impropriety.

‘If you call twenty-eight cents short,’ Diana admitted brazenly.

Burwell took out a handsome billfold and handed her a crisp ten-dollar bill.

‘Mr. Clifton is undoubtedly incognizant of the situation, Miss. I would advise your conferring with him, but until such time as you find it convenient, I would naturally be your banker.’

Diana found herself taking the ten dollars. If Burwell said it was natural for him to be her banker, why, probably it *was* natural.

He waved away her thanks, not haughtily — kindly — and opened the door with one of the most dignified Hollywood bows. She was halfway down the steps when he said hastily: ‘If it was convenient — an afterthought, excuse it, please — to buy some flowers for Mr. Nick, and debit my account.’

‘Why, of course, Burwell.’

‘Sweet peas, if possible. He was always partial to their fragrance.’

‘I’ll send them over.’

‘The hospital — it’s only a step. But it might be too much trouble, Miss. Only I was thinking — if you could take them. You could explain they were from me. And I would appreciate a first-hand report. You know how they are at hospitals, Miss. “Doing nicely. Very comfortable.” If you *could* see him, Miss Diana, I’d feel more easy.’

‘You might go yourself this afternoon, Burwell. There’s no reason you can’t get off.’

'Pardon me, Miss, but with all there's to do with company coming and all, there's ample reason. I can go on my afternoon off, but in the interval I would desire him to have the flowers. *If* you please, Miss. About two dollars' worth, if the bouquet seems adequate.'

'All right, Burwell.'

Behind the closed door Burwell indulged in a private horn-pipe, prancing on the black squares of the marble floor. It was brief because Minna quieted the jigging coat-tails and gray-striped trousers with a sarcastic 'Excuse *me*, Mr. Burwell,' to which Burwell answered quickly: 'Foot's asleep. Pins and needles.'

He stamped his foot heartily. It was not the one he had been hopping on before, Minna noticed.

Chapter 23

HOSPITAL

THERE WERE TWO MEN in the white room. The one behind the door was running his fingers over a page of raised dots. He did it slowly, intently, returning often to the top of the page. He frowned in his intentness, deepening the vertical line between his straight black brows. In spite of the blank stare of the dark glasses there was something alert and alive about him.

The man beyond him and nearer the window had a white gauze turban on his head. His face was wrapped in gauze, too, but out of it looked one serviceable gray eye. He saw Diana standing in the doorway with the square box in her arms and announced to the man in the corner: 'You got company, pal, and how!'

'Did the nurse say so? I'm not expecting anyone.' Nick Jockey found that his fingers had slipped among the raised pin-pricks, and added good-naturedly: 'Confound you, Magee. I've lost my place in "Little Miss Muffet." I'd just got to the spider. But don't tell me how it comes out.'

Diana recognized the voice. Its lightness, its charm, its odd rhythm came, she realized now, because his first speech had been learned from his mother. Neither Paul Revere Square nor Harvard nor China had changed it greatly.

She stepped into the room. He was moving his fingers again over the page.

'It ends badly,' he informed his friend. 'The dame did a bunk.'

'Dames is always scared of spiders,' Magee said tolerantly.

He grinned with what could be seen of his mouth, cocked his gray eye at Diana in a knowing fashion, and added: 'Make yourself at home, lady. No spiders here,' with an encouraging wink.

In the pause that followed, Diana said: 'I'm Diana Jocene. Burwell sent me with some flowers for you.'

Nick Jocene drew a deep breath and said, 'Mayflowers.'

It sounded more like a statement than a question.

'No, sweet peas,' Diana said, 'it isn't time for mayflowers. I'll get some for you when they come.'

He looked up with a slight deepening of the lines around his mouth — it might have been a smile if you could have seen his eyes — and said: 'Sweet peas will do quite as well. Thank you for bringing them. And thank Burwell, please.'

'I will,' Diana said.

She opened the box and set the sweet peas on the table. The florist had put them — fluttering butterflies of rose and cream and lilac — in a jar of greenish-blue.

'What color are they?' he asked.

'If you stood on your head near some sweet-pea vines and looked up at the sky through them and saw some pink

and lavender and ivory butterflies, it would look a little like this,' she said.

He came closer to a smile.

'Hints on flower arrangement. You ought to lecture on it,' he suggested.

Diana said that was an insulting idea. It seems she had been to a lecture on flower arrangement. It made her yearn to clutch petunias and snapdragons and mash them into a cut-glass bowl, no matter what the Society for Educating Vegetation said.

She knew she was talking idiotically. Apparently the owner of the gray eye knew it too. He looked at her with gentle cynicism — or possibly the bandages gave him that look. She hoped it was that.

'Is it true, lady,' he asked, 'that dames will pay to listen to another dame tell 'em how to put one flower beside another? I read about it on the paper, but I didn't believe it.'

Nick Jocene said that truth was stranger than fiction. He also introduced Mr. Magee to Diana. Diana said that what Mr. Magee had heard was so.

'It's kind of out of my line,' Mr. Magee admitted.

'Mr. Magee's a wrestler,' Nick said. 'A crack one.'

'Cracked, you mean,' Magee said. 'Ever see much wrestling, lady?'

'Only in the movies. It looks very dangerous.'

'No more dangerous than flower arrangement,' asserted the wrestler, with a grin that moved the bandages. 'Don't think I picked up these decorations wrestling, lady. It was America's gift to civilization, the automobile, that tossed me into this bed. I'll be out before long now. And won't it feel

good to get out in front of a mob that's yelling its tonsils out and heave the other guy over into South Dakota? But say, excuse me butting in. That's me all over, grabbing off all the wave lengths.'

Mr. Magee turned his eye upon a magazine with two uncannily clean and dapper wrestlers on the cover. He licked his thumb, found a page of luscious technicalities, and gave his attention to it. His own name was not mentioned, he discovered, but he read on, moving his lips contemptuously.

His withdrawal from the conversation did not make it flow easily. Nick Joceleyn, with his fingers still on the raised dots, seemed to be waiting for Diana to go, but she stood there looking at him. The tan was fading from his face and hands leaving a yellowish pallor. The patches of gray at his temples had encroached still further on his black hair. His cheeks undercut the bones above them sharply. One side of his face was neatly shaven; the other was covered by a swarthy stubble that increased his look of illness. There was an electric razor lying beside the blue jar of sweet peas. She wondered if he had been too weak to finish using it.

As if in answer to her thought he said: 'If I'd known I was going to have a visitor I'd have finished mowing my face. Someone next door wanted to use his radio. The shaver makes it stutter and groan. So I stopped.'

'You did a good job as far as you went,' she said, smiling. The smile was in her voice, too, and he responded to it with a real one this time.

'As Burwell used to remark when I cut the grass,' he said. 'My mother — she was here last night — says you're keeping him on. I'm glad. And she tells me she's moving over to the Square for a while. My uncle would be glad too, I know,

both on her account and on Burwell's. It would kill Burwell, I believe, to go somewhere else. You know he practically brought me up. Got me out of scrapes. Sneaked food to me when I was in disgrace, which was — every now and then. Showed me how to shoot marbles so that I was about invincible. Please thank him for the flowers, and ask him to come soon to see me.'

Obviously he meant her to go.

She said quietly: 'I wanted to tell you that the peachblow vase is safe.'

The vivacity with which he had spoken of Burwell had flagged. He said listlessly: 'Oh, that's good.'

'Can you,' she persisted, 'tell me anything about it?'

'I don't know anything. I liked it and I bought it. In a junkshop in Shanghai. One afternoon. The man who had owned it had left the city because of the bombardment. It may be a fake. I didn't pay much for it,' he said in his languid voice.

'I'll take good care of it, anyway.'

He looked amused, and drawled: 'Of course. You're a curator, aren't you? I forgot.'

His tone had the indulgent kindness of a grown-up at a dolls' tea-party. It was unreasonable to be irritated by a man who was ill, nearly blind, and with little hope of recovery. Yet she was irritated.

She tried not to show that she was. When he asked, still in that tolerant voice, how the Help-a-Bit Shop and the Jocene Collection were going to get on together, she answered politely that it would only be for a little while. Bill was going to find another place for the shop. Nick Jocene gave an amused twist to his eyebrows over this information.

He never understood, he said, just how one combined racing and real estate.

Diana had already come to the conclusion that the two pursuits did not blend completely, and that Bill would be a long time re-establishing Eleanor Joceleyn and Clare Desmond and Baron Munchausen anywhere else. She did not tell Nick Joceleyn so. She said good-bye to him with cool politeness and to Mr. Magee with slightly more warmth.

When she looked back, Nick Joceleyn was moving his fingers again in an attempt this time to follow the fortunes of Little Boy Blue. Mr. Magee had given up literature. There was something rather soothing about his final wink; although she did not, of course, need soothing. There was no reason at all to be annoyed by Nick Joceleyn's rudeness. No, not exactly rudeness — he had been pleasant enough about Burwell: an irritating politeness. She was not going to let it bother her. Or think about him. After all, except for the natural feeling of being sorry for anyone who was blind, he was a matter of complete indifference to her. Complete.

It was almost too easy — getting engaged to Peter. She had expected to attend to it when she wasn't quite so busy, and could carry out a complicated plan for getting him to come to see her. Since he had let slip practically all of the week assigned to him, she realized that she would have to undertake the courtship herself. She was quite unprepared to have him stroll into Napoleon's Tomb just as she was dragging the purple-and-gold sofa — the one that looked like a casket — into the hall. A sullen-faced mover with a blue filing case on his shoulder and the words, 'Where'll you

have it, lady?' issuing from the side of his mouth, had collided with Peter at the door.

She told the man where to put it; not where she wanted it, of course, but temporizing, as one does with men of power.

'I can never resist a moving,' Peter said airily. 'Whenever a door is opened and a van backed up, there am I, putting my toes under crates or statuary, dropping china, leaving boxes in doorways. Need some help, lady?'

'I can manage all right,' Diana said, and then remembered that sturdy independence was no note to sound at this moment. What she ought to have said was, 'Terribly,' with a melting glance. That would have led up to: 'Goodness, Peter, how strong you are!'

Realizing that she would have to improve her technique, she added untruthfully: 'I do feel a little tired. Could you put these chairs out in the hall?'

Peter dealt with the rest of the purple-and-gold cohorts. He also lent a helping hand with a squirly-legged table. It had a green marble top. There was a clock that harmonized with it perfectly and had on top of it a figure of Icarus in full flight. His flight on this occasion was, as predicted, to Peter's toe. Peter made a great deal of fuss over this injury.

'I was never one to suffer in silence,' he groaned. 'I leave this unequal combat. In any struggle with art I always come out second best. Symbolic, that's what it is. Ouch! And no sympathy for this blow received in your service. My wound all unbound. You might at least take me away from the scene of carnage.'

He gave another groan and limped toward the library, stating that he would lie down on the sofa and Diana could smooth his brow.

'Your brow?' Diana inquired.

'This is a Victorian mansion. It wouldn't be proper for you to smooth my toe.'

Peter stretched himself on the sofa and put his wounded foot on the arm. From this position he proceeded to pry into the reasons for thrusting out Napoleonic chairs and hurling in such peculiar substitutes.

His comment was: 'Wait till Lucinda Popham hears about this commercial desecration. A poem is the least you can expect. So, Tally-ho, and will the hunt be up!'

'Your mother,' Diana said, 'thought I ought to have a chaperone.'

One of Peter's blond eyebrows was slightly higher than the other. He raised the lower one so that it topped the other by perhaps three eighths of an inch and whistled out of the opposite side of his mouth. Not everyone can do this. Peter achieved it with some difficulty. It gave him an expression of pained surprise.

'What luggage your chaperone carries!' he remarked, restoring his features to their normal irregularity.

Diana explained about that.

'So after tomorrow,' Peter said, sitting up, 'you will be respectable.'

Diana said, 'What of it?' She sat down at her desk and began to write a card for a small rice-patterned bowl.

Peter exclaimed, 'Ouch, my toe,' and added, apparently as an afterthought, 'Then this would be the best day to propose to you.'

'Would it?' Diana inquired coldly.

'You don't seem overcome with joy,' Peter remarked. He got off the sofa, said, 'Ouch,' again, limped over to her desk,

draped himself becomingly over one corner of it, swinging his injured foot and looking down at her with an odd expression, half sulky, half appealing.

Diana tore up the card she had been writing, threw the pieces into the wastebasket, and began to put the same misinformation on another one.

'I suppose you've made up your mind what to say,' Peter observed.

'About what?'

Diana looked up and couldn't help smiling. Neither could Peter help a small-boy grin, rather sheepish and guilty.

Diana said, with what severity she could muster: 'I strongly suspect you, Prince Lobanov, of trying to find out if it's perfectly safe to invite me to be a Princess, before you ask me. Naturally it's pretty dazzling, but, though dazzled and unchaperoned, I'm still from Vermont. Caution is my motto. You'll have to ask me, Peter, if you want to know the answer.'

Peter said, 'Er ——' and looked even guiltier than before.

'I don't know how to put it,' he managed to say at last.

'I'll put it for you,' Diana said. 'You don't want to marry me even with a million dollars thrown in. It's not exactly a compliment, but I don't mind. Your mother is more — practical than you are, so she chased you over here to propose to me. I suppose she'll have to call off her wolfhounds if I decline the honor. And you want to be perfectly sure I will before you ask me. Isn't that about it — coarsely put? In my rustic way?'

Peter turned a curious dull pink and admitted that it was.

'Go ahead then,' Diana said calmly, 'ask me. You may be too late if you don't hurry. It would hardly count if I were

already engaged, would it? And Eben has made an appointment with me for Monday morning at eight-thirty. "To speak of a topic important to us both." Naturally I'm not going to let a good opportunity escape. Even at breakfast time.'

'He did, did he — the louse!' Peter exclaimed with evident sincerity. 'He wasn't supposed to buy up options. I was supposed to get the first chance to propose, because I had the last week.'

'You still have the first chance,' Diana pointed out.

Peter looked sulky again.

He mumbled, 'Well, here goes! Will you marry me, Diana?'

'Yes.'

'Wh-what?'

Peter got off the desk and retreated a few steps, forgetting to limp.

'I said yes. Aren't you pleased? We're engaged now.'

Peter continued to stare at her with his mouth open.

'You can go home and tell your mother,' Diana suggested thoughtfully. 'I'm sure she'll be delighted. But don't tell anyone else. Let's have it for our secret. And — by the way, Peter, what would you do if you had a million dollars?'

'I'd use it to get a million miles from here,' Peter said, finding his voice with a rush.

'That will suit me perfectly,' Diana said, and added kindly, 'I think you left your hat in the hall.'

Polly was sitting with Nick Jockeyln when Peter came in, late that afternoon. Nick could not see the way they looked at each other, but he did not need his eyes to tell him that something was wrong. Their voices were enough. Peter's was always like that — defiant and airy — whenever he got

himself into a jam. The more desperate he felt, the jauntier he sounded. He must, Nick thought, be particularly miserable today.

Probably Peter's mother had been badgering him: that always used to be the trouble. There was no reason to think that Princess Lobanov had changed. She was as consistent as a rattlesnake. The strange thing was that Polly had changed — Polly who had always stuck by Peter and kept him steady through his worst times! It was her voice that was strange with its notes of indifference and coldness. The coldness could not conceal from Nick's ears the pain underneath.

She stayed only a few minutes after Peter came. Peter spent a quarter of an hour in breaking rules for sick-room behavior. He stood up and rattled things in his pockets. He took out a pocket knife and drummed on the table with it. He sat on the foot of the bed and shook it with his gestures. He talked about the South Sea Islands, Lower Burma, and April in England: pleasant places all, no doubt, to those who can visit them. He looked out the window and squeaked his fingers on the pane. He started to go and came back. He dropped his hat and in picking it up knocked over a vase of sweet peas. Only a little of the water ran into the bed, most of it went on the floor.

At this point a nurse arrived. The glare she gave Peter seemed capable of drying up large portions of Lake Superior. She really ought not to have needed the mop she brought. However, she used it with an air of tight-lipped martyrdom.

Peter departed hastily. He had not answered Nick's only question. It was about Uncle Nicholas's porcelains: whether Peter had seen how they were arranged. Few subjects at present interested Peter less than porcelain.

He found Polly in the garden near the big magnolia. She was standing looking up into its pattern of pink and silver and old ivory. The buds were still only stiff cold fingers.

‘You knew I’d come,’ Peter said.

‘Yes. I knew you’d come, Peter.’ Her voice had lost its cold tone now. It was kind enough — only it was tired. ‘And I knew you knew it — that I’d be here. There’s nothing queer about that. After so many years. The queer thing is that it’s the last time.’

‘Polly, don’t! You don’t understand ——’

‘You mean that, when I met your mother this noon and she showed me the emeralds that she was taking to have set in a ring for Diana, she lied to me. She said you had asked Diana to marry you and that she had accepted you. It didn’t sound like a lie.’

‘Yes, but ——’

‘You’re going to say again that I don’t understand. Peter, I’m afraid I do. Somehow — it doesn’t matter how, very much — your mother has pushed you into this. And you expect to squirm out of it and then everything will be all right. But, Peter, don’t you see? — it *won’t* be all right. We’ll be just where we were before. I always said I wouldn’t marry you as long as you were dependent on your mother. Nothing has happened, nothing can happen, to change my mind about that. It’s — it’s just no good, Peter.’

The children who had been playing around the magnolia had gone home long before, but one of them had left a small blue automobile behind him. Polly stooped to pick it up, turned away and laid it carefully on a bench. When Peter saw her face again, she looked much as usual — a pale, plain girl with thick spectacles, anyone would have said: that is,

anyone who had not loved her ever since they had played together under this very tree.

'It's all a mistake,' Peter said hurriedly. 'Diana doesn't care anything about me. Ask her. She'll tell you it's only a joke. I never loved anyone but you. You know that.'

'I'm not jealous, Peter. I like Diana better than anyone — but you. I'd rather have you marry her than have to see your life the way it's been — always.'

Peter said bitterly: 'Don't be so noble. Giving me to someone else! For my sake! What is this? The movies? I tell you, I only went over there so Mother would stop hounding me ——'

'And now your mother's having the Czar's emeralds set for her. Here's your seal ring, Peter. Good-bye. No. Don't come with me.'

'The street's free, isn't it?'

'Yes, but not for quarreling. If — if you care anything at all about me, Peter, you'll let me go.'

'All right. Go on.' He took a knife out of his pocket and opened the blade. 'Why don't you go?' he asked, kneeling and beginning to dig a hole at the foot of the tree. 'Curiosity, of course!' he went on. 'It's native to gardens. If you want to know, I'm burying your ring. So that you can find it when you want it.'

'I shan't want it,' Polly said.

She walked quickly away without looking back.

Peter scratched a small cross on the bark of the magnolia, wrapped the ring in a paint rag, thrust the wadded cloth deep into the hole, and stamped the dirt down over it.

The stamping made him feel better — for almost a minute.

Chapter 24

LOVE IN A CHINA SHOP

EBEN KEITH HAD PREPARED his speech with the care with which he did everything. He was determined it should not fail for lack of adequate rehearsal. He recited it in front of his mirror before breakfast, jotting down the main points on the back of a dentist's appointment card rescued from the wastebasket. Eben never squandered paper. His father had died when Eben was young, but not before he had taught his son to cut off the backs of envelopes and make them into neat packages for notebooks.

Eben smoothed his ash blond hair over the thin place at the top. The mirror gave a satisfactory view of the chaste severity of his Oxford-gray suit, of the restrained elegance of the three dollars and a half's worth of striped dark and light gray silk knotted with masterly precision, of the shirt with the neat cording of gray and white. Eben was concave at the point where — he noticed with increasing pleasure — some of his contemporaries were becoming immodestly convex. He had a right to be pleased with his slender, tastefully clad figure.

He regretted his spectacles for a moment and tried the effect without them. Observing that the absence of their gold and crystal luster gave him a somewhat uncooked appearance around his pale brown eyes, he restored the glasses to their place on his handsome nose. He surveyed his long chin carefully in the hand mirror for defects in shaving, but found none. He had never noticed that — in Polly Shatswell's wicked phrase — he always talked as if he were sucking a lemon.

Eben was used to his mouth. He did not care for people who smiled a great deal. Insincere, he thought them. His teeth were fine, but he saw no reason for displaying them constantly to the general public. When Eben enjoyed a joke — he had a discriminating sense of humor — he laughed heartily, but an eternal grin was no asset to a man who intended to get on in the world.

A grave face lighting up occasionally was, Eben had read somewhere, very attractive. There was the element of surprise . . .

Eben practiced a grave face lighting up along with his speech. He tried it when he said, 'When I think of you, alone, unprotected, inexperienced, it hurts me — here,' indicating a point slightly above and to the left of his Phi Beta Kappa Key. It was definitely surprising. Perhaps too much so. Like finding you have sugared a fishball . . .

He took another quick look at the card and said — to the mirror: 'I have always been lonely, Diana. I can understand your loneliness. Together' — here he tried the smile again. It went much better. He put a small cross on the card to remind him to use it.

He ran through the rest of the speech quickly, putting two

more crosses — for sudden face-lighting — at strategic points. Then he went downstairs, drank his coffee and his orange juice with conscientious slowness, chewed his dry toast carefully, and read his newspaper. He had allowed plenty of time. He even — as was his habit — had leisure to acquaint his mother with the high-lights of the day's news. Eben was always thoughtful in little ways. After his succinct summaries of world affairs, of the editorials, and his suggestions about solving the crossword puzzle, it was really hardly necessary for Mrs. Keith to read the paper at all. She persisted in doing so, however, and sometimes found some item — a nice death or a horticultural hint — out of which Eben had not already squeezed the juice.

Mysteriously the last two inches of toast seemed to stick about an inch and a half below his collar button. A soda mint relieved him, yet left behind the consciousness that another might be needed. He took it as he waited for Burwell to open the door.

Burwell, he decided, was getting entirely past his work. Slower and lazier all the time. Diana must be made to see that. After all, Burwell had his legacy, or would have soon.

It was a shock to Eben to find the Help-a-Bit Shop in the reception room. Why hadn't he been told about this? Couldn't a man go away for what was very likely the last really good skiing without this sort of thing going on behind his back? His mother ought to have told him. Of course he had often said that he never wanted anything to disturb his breakfast, but in a case like this . . .

Eben disapproved wholeheartedly of the entire affair — the vulgar clack of the typewriter, Baron Munchausen's rattling accompaniment, the incongruous furnishings —

sky-blue filing cabinets indeed! And chintz! And the black-haired girl with the queer eyes who whistled while she worked. Walt Disney to the contrary, Eben saw nothing virtuous in combining whistling and work. Bold-faced was the adjective he selected for Clare Desmond.

He was not mollified by having her stop whistling and ask him an idiotic question: 'Can I do anything for you? Take your dog to walk or something?'

Eben said stiffly, 'I have no dog.'

'That's too bad.'

She seemed to be sympathizing with him. Eben resented it. He scowled around the little room so inappropriately brightened. His pale brown glance fell upon a sign propped up on the mantelpiece.

'The Help-a-Bit Shop,' he read in a voice that was a nice blend of curiosity and contempt. 'Do I understand that you are conducting a business enterprise? In Paul Revere Square?'

He spoke in much the same tone of loathing in which the spirit of Isabella Stewart Gardner might mention that she had heard Fenway Court was now a roller-skating rink. Or as if he had found a toad in his soup plate.

Clare Desmond said that it was temporary. Until Mr. Shatswell found them a place. She didn't think they'd broken the zoning law. It was all done, she said placatingly, in such a hole-and-corner sort of way. Rather like a speak-easy.

'Nevertheless,' Eben said, with dreadful severity, 'I shall report it to the Paul Revere Square Associates.'

He liked the implacable ring in his voice. At least he did until Diana said behind him: 'Don't set the police on us, Eben. So early in the morning.'

He ground his teeth slightly and turned around. He did not approve of her costume — a skirt the color of the gaudy fling cabinets and a primrose sweater. That anyone would wear scarlet leather sandals with such a costume seemed indecent to Eben. Besides, her feet were too small. He had noticed it at the Wishing Well. She must pinch them. No one in Paul Revere Square had feet like that. It was hardly respectable.

Her costume was not the worst thing about her. She had her arm linked in the arm of That Woman. His Uncle John's divorced wife. Whom his mother Never Spoke To. And to whom Diana was, quite unnecessarily, now presenting him.

He mumbled something and felt like a guilty schoolboy under Mrs. Jocene's polite but frosty blue glance. He was reminded unpleasantly of the time Nick caught him playing with Peter for Peter's first marbles. Nick had made Eben give them all back — fifty or more — on the ground that Eben had better choose someone his own age. To Eben's protest that he had played fair, Nick had replied by much the same coldly amused glance that Eben now found turned on him. It had been reinforced, on that long ago spring day, by Nick's thin fingers digging into his arm.

It is certainly to Eben's credit that he shook off his embarrassment and the spectral clutch of fingers on his forearm. The thought that Nick, at least, would never look at anyone like that again slid through his mind. He was sorry about Nick, of course, but the thought somehow steadied him. His voice was calm as he reminded Diana of their appointment. Many a man would have made an excuse at this point and skulked away to his office. But not Eben. Inflexible. That's what he was. No matter what the obstacles.

One obstacle was the appearance of the library. He was appalled by the clutter. There was china all over the place, stacked on the piano, on bookcases, on tables. Where there wasn't china there were books, open books, piles of books, books with mangy little slips of paper stuck into them, scrapbooks in the process of being filled with clippings. Glue and paste and labels and catalogue cards filled any intervening spaces. The furniture from the reception room — now improperly and in defiance of every tenet of Paul Revere Square the Help-a-Bit Shop — had been moved in here. The chairs were already heaped with back numbers of *Antiques*. However, the purple-and-gold sofa was still unoccupied. Diana sat on it while Eben, after carefully shutting the door, began to deliver his speech.

He declined her invitation to sit down. He said humorously — it was always wise, he knew, to begin with some light, amusing quip — that he felt like a bull in a china shop, but Diana mustn't worry. He wouldn't break anything.

In spite of his pacing about as he talked — he always thought best on his feet, he said — he did not actually knock anything over, although he did come into contact with a sang-de-boeuf jar when he was taking a brief glance at his notes. He steadied it without missing a word, pausing only — he had noticed a cross at that place — for one of those surprising smiles.

The speech sounded even better than it had before the mirror. Twice Diana started to interrupt, but he waved her words aside with just the right gesture, tolerant but masterful. She looked down at her ridiculous red sandals a good deal, so that what Eben saw of her was chiefly the pale gold glint along her braided crown of hair, the darker gold of her

eyelashes, and the tip of her nose — a feature, like her feet, inadequate by Paul Revere Square standards.

Eben forgot nothing. Every topic was covered: his ancestry, his clean life, his college record, his prospects, his ambition, his loneliness, a loneliness not of body, but of soul. An only child. Fatherless at an early age. Kindly nurtured by a devoted mother in all material ways, it is true, but Spiritually Alone. Consolation he had sought in Nature's wide, clean, snow-swept hills, and found it. Here followed a paragraph on skiing and Nature's solitudes that really ought to have been included in the ski train advertising.

Diana, who had seen the Sherburne Trail in company with about two thousand other lonely souls, wondered just where there was any available solitude. However, she said nothing so frivolous and Eben swung into his peroration.

'And when I think of you, alone, unprotected, inexperienced, it hurts me — here.'

She missed the gesture. She was still looking at those scraps of scarlet leather.

It was not in the script, but he interpolated: 'Look up at me, Diana.'

She did. There was a strange sparkle about her eyes, a look that Eben had never seen before. It made his voice tremble in a way that he felt must be effective — although he had not planned it that way — as he went on: 'I have always been lonely, Diana. I understand your loneliness. Give me the right to protect you. Share with me my solitude! Be my wife, Diana!'

He slipped the dentist's card into his pocket and glanced at his wrist watch. He had touched her evidently. She had turned her head aside and had put her handkerchief to her eyes.

‘Don’t give me my answer now,’ he said gently. ‘This is — must be — a surprise to you. I will leave you and come again. This evening, perhaps.’

She got up and said with an abruptness for which he was not prepared, ‘I’d better tell you now.’

It was like a ski striking a hidden rock. The choked feeling below his collar button returned.

‘It’s a secret, but I feel I must tell you,’ she said, with a strange lack of expression. ‘I am engaged to Peter.’ Then, seeing his face stiffen into anger, she added, ‘I tried to tell you but ——’

‘You can’t mean it,’ he burst out furiously. ‘That moron. Waster. Loafer. And so under his mother’s thumb that he jilted another girl so he could chase after your money. You’ll be sorry.’

‘I don’t think, Eben,’ Diana said coldly, ‘that you ought to talk that way about my fiancé.’

Eben could only glare at her, but not for long. Even as it was he was five minutes late at the office.

Chapter 25

NEW CELLOPHANE NEEDED

ONLY A SHALLOW OBSERVER would expect Ebenezer Joceneyn Keith to be satisfied with Diana's refusal. He realized at once that he must save Diana from a disastrous marriage. Putting the matter on a moral ground gave it, as it usually did with Eben, a particular urgency. He gave his whole mind to the best way of breaking up what he thought of as the Lobanov conspiracy. When Eben gave his whole mind to anything, he got results. One was that he neglected to order a part for one of the tea-bag filling machines. This meant that the machine would be out of commission for an extra day. Eben did not enjoy the reproof he received, but he consoled himself with the thought that when he owned the Company things would be different. The important thing at the moment was to think out the steps necessary to put him in that position. A few tea-bags more or less was a comparatively trivial matter.

Obviously the first step was to get That Woman and her shop out of Paul Revere Square. They were unquestionably

a bad influence. Eben resented the fact that he had been obliged to make his speech among china dumped out of the reception room to make room for a dubious business with a silly name. The best plan, he decided, would be to stir up Bertram Shatswell about this insidious attack on the Square's integrity.

As to what Eben could only regard as sordid fortune-hunting on Peter's part, Eben had another idea. It had to do with the financial columns of the paper, an unpleasant sight that March to most eyes, but to Eben oddly gratifying. March had come into the stock market like a lion and, having eaten up all the lambs in sight, was going out like a lion too. The lion bore some resemblance to Adolf Hitler, a figure who had not up to this time enjoyed Eben's approval. A man who would put Hannes Schneider in prison! However, the stock exchange news was pleasing to Eben.

He dismissed the topic and turned his thoughts to Polly Shatswell in whose welfare he was taking an interest, belated but sincere. Singleton, he decided, would be his best distributor of information. Let Singleton find out there was a secret and Eben could trust this most heartily disliked of all his cousins to find it out and tell it. An accurate appraisal of his family's weak spots had often stood Eben in good stead.

While he was concerned with these soothing thoughts and taking soda mints — for his sensitive digestion had not entirely recovered — the Help-a-Bit Shop was having a busy morning. Priscilla and Dan were there. They were having a vacation and it had begun to pall. Mrs. Nesbitt had gone to attend an important conference about preserving something. Not children. Something antique. Bill had actually sold a house — believe it or not. The deal was going through

that morning and he had to be downtown. And it was a rainy day.

Diana was still listening to Eben's oratory when Bill came and left the children in the hands of the Help-a-Bit Shop. Clare Desmond had accepted them and was placidly typing announcements of the Shop's temporary quarters while the children were lions and tigers under the table. Baron Munchausen did his best to drown the roars and growls. After a while they died down. Dan found an atlas and lay on his stomach following the course of strange rivers with a stubby finger and happily chanting strange names.

Priscilla turned her attention to reaching the top of a blue filing cabinet. Surprisingly no one said, 'Don't, Priscilla.' She got there easily and neatly without scratching anything. She put a newspaper on the back of the chair before she stood on it. You couldn't hurt a black mantelpiece much anyway. She sat there swinging her skinny legs, but keeping her large feet stuck out so she wouldn't hurt the paint.

Her feet swung close to Clare Desmond's left ear, but Clare didn't seem to mind. After a while she began whistling. Priscilla came down from the top of the cabinet, still without damaging anything, and sat down where she could keep her bright eyes fastened on Clare's face. Priscilla looked especially plain this morning.

Clare did not seem to find Priscilla's comic ugliness less attractive than Dan's solemn beauty. In fact, Diana noticed as she came into the office there was something especially kind in the glance Clare cast upon the ugly duckling of the Shatswell family.

Diana had examined Clare on the subject of horses. The result was highly satisfactory. Clare, it appeared, was home-

sick for pungent stable smells and a canter on green grass. She wanted the electric feel of bit and bridle running through her finger-tips. She would like to make a horse wheel on a postage stamp as she laid the reins lightly against his neck. She wanted the scream-scream of leather and the sound of a velvet muzzle blowing whirlpools in a mountain brook. She was, in short, from Diana's point of view pleasantly and conveniently insane.

Bill proposed that afternoon. He had none of Eben's eloquence.

'I'm not much of a catch, Diana,' he said, 'but I'd have a good try at making you happy — if you'd have me. I'll — I'll give you Firefly for your own, if you like.'

It was then that Diana told him a little — only a little — of what she thought about horses. He pretended politely not to believe it, just as he would have if she had confided gently that her father had been a bank robber and that she herself enjoyed a little good clean safe-cracking over an occasional week-end.

She didn't blame Bill for seeming slightly relieved at her refusal of himself as well as of Firefly, or for seeming anxious to get away before she changed her mind. She knew that he must feel that no really good, pure woman could have said that the only horse she had ever really enjoyed riding was a rocking-horse! No wonder Bill stayed only long enough to say that he was going to take the children to the country tomorrow; that Mrs. Joceneyn had said that she could get on without Miss Desmond for the day, and that Miss Desmond had said she'd like to go along — to look after the kids.

'Great idea, this Help-a-Bit racket,' Bill concluded, with a cheerfulness praiseworthy in one who had just seen a million

dollars fall at the first fence. 'Tell her to wear her riding togs. I'll have a mount for her.'

Diana had, briefly, the wicked notion of calling Bill back and telling him she had changed her mind, just for the pleasure of seeing the dismay on his earnest pink face, but she suppressed this frivolity.

Instead she said: 'I know you'll want to give me your best wishes, Bill. I'm engaged to Peter. It's a secret, of course.'

Bill's felicitations seemed to contain a larger percentage of disapproval than regret. He did not mention that Peter had ever been engaged to anyone else. Bill was always a gentleman, a trait that takes a lot of the spice out of conversation.

Diana felt oddly shaken by the last few days. In thinking them over, she dropped the top of a Lowestoft tea-caddy.

She had not seen Peter again, but Princess Lobanov had called on her that afternoon just after Bill left. It was a visit of state conducted, on the Princess's part, in the grand manner. The Princess had ignored the Help-a-Bit Shop carefully, painfully, as if it had been a paper napkin at a dinner party.

The drawing-room being in use — Mrs. Joceneyn was listening to a client there — the Princess was shown into the chaotic library. Perhaps this interview, during which Diana felt as if she were in a registry office and as if the Princess were looking her over as a possible kitchenmaid, was what made Diana tired enough to drop Lowestoft tea-caddy covers. Part of her Aunt Sophia's condescension had taken the form of recounting her own triumphs over the nobility and gentry of a couple of continents.

'There are only six kinds of proposals,' she concluded, removing her svelte black elegance from the purple sofa; 'after that they are all the same.'

Diana, going upstairs for the night with an aching head, wondered if Princess Lobanov had ever had four proposals — if you counted Peter's — between Saturday and Monday. Mr. Griffin had returned to the charge on Sunday. Diana did not aspire to qualify as an expert, but she felt that she was entitled to an opinion — as an amateur, of course. The opinion was that there were as many kinds of proposals as there were men.

She was not, she realized, yawning and tumbling into bed, likely to have any more tomorrow. So she could get the library cleaned up . . .

In spite of her sleepiness she lay awake for a while thinking about Polly Shatswell. She understood now why Polly had lost her friendly look lately. From the various remarks she had heard, Diana had pieced the whole thing together — Peter and Polly's secret and hopeless engagement, Peter's struggles to escape from the Princess, Polly's daily diet of humiliation and uncertainty. She saw Polly's expression, patient, hurt, and puzzled.

'She won't look like that when I get through with her,' Diana said to herself, and on that boastful note — her plans for Polly's facial improvement were still of the haziest — she went to sleep.

It was morning suddenly. Sunlight was shining on the peachblow vase, lending it new color and warmth. The sun had widened its circle enough to shine into her window early now. Across the Square there were crocus cups of purple and white and gold with bees crawling into them. The grass around Paul Revere's statue was green. The mountain of gritty, cinder-freckled snow near her own steps had gone at last. The buds of the magnolias around the statue had begun to open.

It was not safe, of course, to say that it was spring. In New England spring resents premature advertisement and has a wide repertory of ways to show her annoyance. Still, one might mention in an undertone that it wouldn't be long now. Besides, there was one sign impossible to disregard. Dan and Priscilla were playing hopscotch. They were playing it much too early in the morning and — just to make it harder — on roller skates. Diana felt it was lucky they were going to the country. It seemed obvious that Paul Revere Square would not approve of hopscotch on roller skates. She could see old Mr. Jeremy Fothergill standing at the window in his nightshirt watching them. She felt sure that when he went away it was to write a letter to the Paul Revere Square Associates. Luckily he could not see that Priscilla, finding hopscotch and roller skates incompatible, had now shinned over the railing and was riding pillion behind Paul Revere. That peculiar noise was the skates whanging against the horse's flanks in an effort to urge him to greater activity. Now Dan had mounted on the horse's neck and was chanting, 'One if by land and two if by sea.' Decidedly Dan and Priscilla needed space for their activities.

Fortunately Clare Desmond soon appeared in her riding clothes. They were far from new, but Clare looked, somehow, splendid in them. There was a gleam of excitement in her smoky blue eyes, pleasure in the tilt of her black head, a special gaiety in her whistle. It took almost no time to prevent further desecration of the Square's patron saint. Really from a number of points of view it was a good thing for the Help-a-Bit Shop to send its secretary on a mission to the country.

Mrs. Jocelyn had said that she could easily spare her secre-

tary. She did not expect a busy day, but the telephone began to ring soon after Clare had gone. The Listener needed an especially receptive ear, it seemed. What she heard she never told — a quiet tongue being a Listener's chief asset — but doubtless it was important to her clients.

She said at luncheon, with a somewhat harassed air: 'It's nice to be busy, but I promised Nick to take him a book. In Braille. He asked for something more exciting than Mother Goose. I've got "Alice" for him — he still has to read something he pretty well knows by heart. Could you take it over, Burwell?'

'Certainly, Madam, but — there's the door and the telephone and your clients coming and it's Minna's day out and what with Miss Desmond away ——'

'I'm quite strong enough to open the door myself,' Mrs. Jockeyne announced, but Burwell said firmly: 'It wouldn't be suitable. Perhaps when Miss Diana goes to the market ...'

'I'll take it, of course,' Diana said.

The room had become familiar now. Burwell had been ingenious in thinking up reasons for her visits. It was a kind of game that she found herself playing without knowing exactly what she was doing in it. She told herself that she went largely out of curiosity. She wanted to see if Nick Jockeyne would ever again treat her like a human being. The question was still unanswered.

His bed was empty today. Magee, the wrestler, shorn of his bandages, was alone in the room. He proved, surprisingly, to have a bald head. There was a new pink scar on it that ran down near his right eye and other scars in the bristles around his jaw.

He greeted Diana cheerfully.

'Is he better? I suppose so, if he's up. I'll just leave this book. His mother sent it. Will you tell him?' Diana said.

'Yes, he is better,' the wrestler said, not paying any attention to the Braille version of 'Alice in Wonderland,' a big volume with thousands of pin-pricks on the stiff pages. 'They could do the operation, if they could get the material, I guess.'

'I don't understand.'

'I will give you the dope. Like the nurse gave it to me. It seems there is a piece of your eye called the cornea. Kind of horny stuff like cellophane wrapping. Well, if that thickens up you cannot see. Like if someone decided they would wrap your eye in plain paper instead of cellophane. Get the idea?'

Diana said she did.

'Well, now, Nick — he said to call him that — has got what the docs call a central opacity on this cellophane stuff, which means it is like a thick spot in front of his eye. Both eyes. He can see a little light around it now that the rest of his eye is healed up, but that is all.'

'And it won't clear up?'

'Not a chance. But these docs — you got to hand it to 'em for some nifty ideas — if they had a nice fresh pair of corneas, they would peel his off and sew some new ones on instead. Or, anyway, kind of patch them. Only they have not got any material.'

'But — where would they get it?'

'From someone that had to lose his eye for some other reason that did not hurt the cornea. Or from some individual that had — that did not need his any more,' Mr. Magee said delicately.

‘You mean from a — a dead person, but ——’

‘Yes. And I suppose you are thinking they is plenty of them, which is what I said to the nurse. Well, it appears it ain’t — is not — so simple. These corneas has got to be in first-class condition, so they would like to get them, I suppose, off someone in pretty good health and there is quite a lot of the population that is not in good health when they die,’ the wrestler explained carefully. ‘Then it’s got to be done right away. Sometimes they’s relatives that object, claiming when the body is resurrected there will be a couple of corneas short. Which it seems to *me* that anyone that is smart enough to resurrect you and get you hitting on all eight cylinders would not worry about a little glass for the windshield. What is your opinion?’

‘Like yours,’ Diana said. ‘Just because a man lost his foot, for instance, he wouldn’t have to limp always. There’s enough cruelty in this world. I don’t believe it goes on in the next.’

‘You are right, I hope. It would not be a great deal of fun. Like — like being a wrestler that could not wrestle.’ He paused, turning his clear gray eyes toward the window for a moment, and then went on: ‘So you see it’s not so easy. The way I work it out is, you got to find someone healthy and dead and without any relations to make a fuss. And you have to approach him tactfully — which it is a difficult subject to be tactful about — while he is still alive and get him to sign a paper saying the docs can have what’s left over. Though I must say they are very nice about it. They spoke to me on the subject one time and I signed up. Making a contribution to the advancement of science, I think the doc called it. Only unfortunately it seems I am recovering. It is

hard to break up a Magee even with a large truck. We are tough guys.'

'Are you a big family?' Diana asked.

'I spoke poetical. Coming down to everyday statistics, I am all the Magees they is. Of my own particular lot. Kind of a lone wolf, as it were.'

Diana started to go, but he said persuasively: 'Do not hurry, if it can be helped. You could not have an idea how dull it is here for him. I read to him sometimes about how the Chinamen — Chinese — are getting on, but I am an uncultivated baboon ——'

There were steps along the passage.

The wrestler muttered hastily: 'Don't mention — er — cellophane. I don't think they told him yet.'

The nurse at Nicholas Joceneyn's elbow said sweetly: 'Here we are. Back safe *and* sound. And we have a visitor. With a big, big book.'

Diana had not realized that his face could express so much pleasure.

'Mother,' he said, taking a quick step forward.

Diana said, 'I'm sorry,' and the nurse gabbled coyly, 'Guess again, Mr. Joceneyn. Three guesses.' She gave one of her mirthless, professional giggles and added, 'Pretty young for a mother. There with that hint!'

His face had already sagged back to its look of blank politeness. He bowed slightly, stiffly, and said, 'Good afternoon, Miss Joceneyn.'

The nurse said, with approval, 'Smart boy,' then, finding that he had detached his elbow from her warm clasp and was moving alone toward his bed, changed it to 'Naughty boy!'

She pursued him, tucked him into bed with fussy kindness

(Well, all right, we can keep our dressing-gown on, if we like. Don't we look nice in that dark red, Miss Joceneyn? And don't we know it?) and departed in a flutter of starch and coyness.

'Your mother couldn't come, so she sent me to bring you this copy of "Alice,"' Diana said.

His face lightened a little as he thanked her and took the book.

'Hope it will be peppier than the last one you read me,' the wrestler said in his hoarse, friendly voice.

'Sidney does not care for the classics,' Nick Joceneyn said, touching a group of dots lightly. 'Mother Goose bored him.'

'And how! And call me Sidney again and you will find absorbent cotton in your soup,' Mr. Sidney Magee promised.

'He likes to be called Crusher,' Nick Joceneyn explained. 'It makes him feel more brutal.'

Magee winked carefully at Diana, so that she would be sure his remarks were intended to be taken lightly, and went on: 'A gentleman usually offers a lady a chair, I heard. Keeping up with Emily Post, like I do.'

'And you kept her standing, Sidney! I mean Crusher.'

'When you find this cotton in your soup it will perhaps choke you,' Mr. Magee retorted, and added a wheezy laugh.

Diana said she must go now. She did not, however. Another nurse, a grave one this time, appeared with two orderlies. Between them they moved the wrestler's heavy body onto a wheeled table and pushed him away.

'Stay till I get back, Miss. He needs someone to quarrel with,' he wheezed over his shoulder.

She stayed: partly because of the appeal in the wrestler's voice, partly out of a stubborn intention of making some im-

pression on her cousin's cool composure. Curiosity, too, played its part in her staying. Why did he dislike her? Why did he always treat her with a cold politeness so much ruder than any boorishness?

He asked her to sit down and she did. The coldness melted out of his voice as he asked about his mother, about Clare Desmond, about Burwell. It disappeared entirely as he spoke of Crusher Magee.

'I hope he'll get good news today. Even if he doesn't, it's time they stopped kidding him along.'

'How do you mean?'

'Either he's going to be able to walk again or he's not. They must know by this time, I should think. Naturally I know a lot more than the doctors. All the patients do. The nurses keep us filled up with first-hand misinformation about each other.'

'Was his back injured in the accident? He didn't say anything about it.'

'He wouldn't. But it was. And he's had no feeling in his feet since. It sounds bad to me.'

It did to Diana. She saw again the look with which Magee had said, 'It would not be a great deal of fun — like being a wrestler that could not wrestle.'

'What — what would happen to him?' she asked.

'It was a truck belonging to a big company that ran over him. They might do something for him. Only apparently they were not at fault. From his own account it seems that the accident happened because he slipped on the icy street and that he wasn't crossing at the right place. Jay-walking and with the lights against him.'

'I suppose wrestlers make a lot of money. I hope he has

some saved up. Anyway, he doesn't have to be in a big ward, so I suppose he must be all right about money.'

'Probably, but ——'

He did not finish the sentence and did not need to. It rang in Diana's ears as clearly as if he had said: 'What use would his life be?' He would not say it: it would sound too much like his own cry. From her an expression of pity for a wrestler who might never wrestle any more would have sounded too much like pity for a flyer without wings. There was nothing to say. Instead she told him about the Paul Revere Square's horror over the invasion of the Help-a-Bit Shop; about how Bertram Shatswell had called to protest and had remained to hire someone to give a beauty treatment to his shelves of brown-and-gold books. She told him about Clare Desmond and the Shatswell children starting off for the country in Bill's old car: Clare and Priscilla as eager as young colts turned out to pasture, Bill beaming like a rising Hunter's Moon, his small son grave and a little pale.

'Dan, I'm afraid, regards that noble animal horse about the way I do,' Diana said.

'And how is that?'

'Half a ton of feet, teeth, rolling eyes, practical jokes. We like them best in bronze or porcelain.'

He laughed — well, almost laughed, chuckled anyway — and asked, 'Does Bill know?'

'About me. Not about Dan. He just knows Dan holds on by the reins. A disgrace to a Shatswell.'

'Worse than kleptomania,' agreed Nick solemnly.

She had for the moment the sense that they were approaching each other; as if the next minute he might treat her like a friend, not like a district visitor. Perhaps he might

have if they had not been interrupted by the return of the wrestler with his *entourage*.

Perhaps it was only the fact that the light struck full on him instead of being behind him that made it seem as if Magee's face had turned gray. Perhaps it was only the hospital pallor and the gray stubble on his chin. He seemed cheerful enough, joking with the orderlies, advising them how to lift him, threatening to pitch them into the river. He succeeded in making the nurse temper the natural vinegar of her expression with a little olive oil of kindness. Her voice in her last few remarks sounded hardly at all like a police-woman examining a prisoner.

'So you let her sit down at last!' Magee remarked with one of his winks.

His face had lost most of its gray look now that he was back in bed again. It must have been the light, Diana thought.

'But this time I'm really going,' she said.

'Back to Paul Revere Square?'

'Yes. Do you know it?'

'I would hope I know it. I had a paper route there when I was a boy. I wisht I had a dollar for every time I have jumped those railings and climbed up on Paul Revere's horse, and this guy in the becoming red wrapper over there tagging along behind. His uncle was a gentleman with a remarkable power of language. If he caught me. Mostly he did not. Being early in the mornings or dark evenings . . . Pretty soon now those flowers will be out on the trees. Like strawberry and vanilla in one cone.'

'Magnolias?'

'Maybe. Ice-cream flowers, I called them. Summer eve-

nings the leaves would be dusty. They planted cannas and geraniums around Paul's horse. I broke a canna once and he caught me. Remember, Nick?'

'I remember.'

'Blasted me into the river almost — and gave me five bucks at Christmas just the same. I run away next year to the War . . . I was always big and husky. Besides, I did not know my birthday, so it might be what I told them was true enough. About how old I was. I did not enjoy that War on account of some sergeants I met. It was them made a pacifist of me. But I learned to wrestle . . . Paul Revere Square. Number 37 . . . He was a good guy. Took the *Herald* and the *Transcript* and the *New York Times* and the *Boston American*, regular. Liked to strike an average, he said. And five bucks at Christmas. No matter if you did have a horticultural accident. He called it that. I wish I'd thought to send him a ticket to one of my bouts. Too late now. I always think of things too late.'

There was a note of weariness in his voice.

Nick Joceleyn said in a new tone, not the tolerant one used for intrusive visitors: 'He'd like to know you remembered him, but he's seen you wrestle. I forgot to tell you. I took him. He didn't know much about wrestling, but he went because he remembered you jumping the railings. He saw you throw some Pole around. Said it didn't surprise him a bit. You and I were the only idiots that thought jumping that fence was an easy way of getting across the Square, he said. Only, of course, I never did it with half a ton of *Transcripts* on my back. He said you were always made of steel and rubber.'

'Did he? Well, so I was. So I was.'

As she walked back to the Square, Diana seemed to see a tall figure with a bundle of papers at his back vault lightly across the fence of spears.

The magnolia tree would open its ice-cream flowers before long, but this spring no one, she thought, would vault the railings.

Chapter 26

VISIT TO THE SICK

THE ELEVATOR THAT TOOK Diana down brought up another visitor. The elevator man had not noticed Diana. He had not mentioned the weather — a subject about which elevator men, sliding up and down in electrically lighted tunnels as they do, have a surprising amount of information. This is a mystery like why geese fly South. Old Nicholas Jocene used to say that in the flying wedge there was always one old gander with sacroiliac trouble; when he began to have sciatic twinges, it was time to start for Florida. But that does not explain why geese fly North. And throws no light at all on elevator men.

To the new passenger this elevator man confided that it was a fine day for the time of year. But they might have rain later. Possibly he felt sciatic twinges. Who knows?

Not the passenger certainly. She was busy with her mirror, reddening lips already like the stripes of a new flag, powdering a steeply haughty nose with a new coating that made it perfect for skiing — on a small scale, of course — passing a

blue comb through her prematurely platinum hair. She wore blue with a good deal of pink in surprising places. That is, in Paul Revere Square it might have been surprising. The elevator man was naturally too blasé to be astonished by stockings that brought to mind a boiled lobster. Or was it strawberry sherbet they suggested? A glance at the accompanying gloves left one in doubt.

The elevator man amplified his remarks about atmospheric conditions, but Miss Velma Libby did not trouble to answer him.

An elevator man — as she often sagely remarked — can get to the top easy enough, but does he stay there?

The remark was not original with Miss Libby, but the laugh with which she always followed it was her own — a sound a little like a finger-nail squeaking on a blackboard.

She dropped the comb back into her shiny blue bag, thus giving the elevator man a view of a little of everything. He had seen into women's bags before, but he had seldom seen a fatter roll of dirtier bills. He watched her with respect as she tottered off toward the swinging doors on the high heels of tight pink-and-blue shoes.

Miss Libby walked past the three nurses who were laughing merrily under the sign that said, QUIET PLEASE. She cocked her head proudly in its pyramid of lacquered straw with the raspberry sink brush at the side and ignored them.

'Thank God, I am not a nurse,' she thought devoutly. 'Imagine wearing those funny caps!'

Miss Libby had escaped being a nurse by a fairly wide margin — she had been until recently a hostess in a Dime-a-Dance Hall, one of Fifty Seductive Girls with Glamor — but

her thankfulness was perfectly sincere. Anyone to whom the idea occurred might have felt the same — patients, for instance.

She knew her way to Crusher's room without asking the despised nurses. She had been twice before. Once he was too sick to speak, or to understand what she wanted to tell him. The other time that blind man was there. Not that he could see her. He had sat running his fingers over a book, in a dopey way, like he was way off somewhere, so perhaps he wasn't listening, but you couldn't tell with anyone like that. He might just be putting on an act. She wanted to see Crusher alone, but she'd have to tell him today anyhow...

The blind man was still there. Before she spoke he said, 'Here's Miss Libby, Crusher.' He knew her step, it seemed. It was uncanny. She didn't like it. Still she spoke politely. 'Hawayah, Mr. Jocelun,' she said, in accents copied from a screen favorite. Neither the favorite nor Miss Libby really had adenoids. It was just a way of speaking.

Crusher woke up at that. He was dozing with his bald head turned so that the scars showed up something fierce. All lumpy, and kind of pink and purple.

She wished they had not taken the bandages off. It made her sorry to see the scars, and she did not want to feel sorry. She wanted to be sure he was all right again. His seamed and disfigured head aroused some doubt. She choked down her spasm of pity. Impatience rose in its place — a natural sequence. After all, what were a few purple ridges to a man like Crusher, always in danger of having his ears torn off or his nose broken — and liking it.

A picture of Crusher as she had seen him in the arena that time — contorted, his face disfigured, looking, she thought,

like some old alligator as he squirmed and thumped and grunted — rose in her mind and stiffened her resolution.

Her voice had its sharpest note as she observed: 'Well, have we got it pretty soft here! Nothing to do but sleep, hahn?'

She laughed the slate-pencil laugh again and sat down with her back to the sourpuss with the black windows over his eyes. She didn't want that masked gaze turned on her. It made her uneasy. As if it were any of his business if she gave Crusher back his ring . . . And she must do it today, because Mike . . .

There was something screwy about Crusher. He didn't have any snappy, wise-cracking greeting. He stared at her in a dumb kind of way as if her lipstick had slipped or something.

All he said was, 'You came. You came,' in a kind of hoarse mutter.

'Sure I did,' she said lightly, inspecting her makeup again, and improving it a bit here and there — a touch more eye-shadow, a shade more rouge.

He picked up the open bag and looked into it. She ought not to have left it so near him, she realized. She dropped the compact on the bed.

'Whatcha doing, you big chimpanzee, hahn?' she asked, turning on the laugh again. 'Who said you could look in my bag?'

She tried to snatch it from him, all in fun, of course. In the scuffle he turned it upside down. The contents rained on the bed — the cigarettes, the bottle of Sommevol tablets with the scrawled 'One at night if wakeful' on the label, the dirty roll of hundreds and fifties that Mike Prelgousky had

given her to buy her ticket — and things; also crumpled bits of cellophane and tinfoil, the flashlight picture of her and Mike dancing together, the blue velvet box with the ring in it.

The whole story was there if Crusher only had the wit to see it. First she'd hoped he wouldn't, now she wished he would, and have it over with. Let him get mad if he liked. Only he was in that dopey mood. He didn't seem to notice anything — not even that she was not wearing his ring.

He picked up the money in one big hand, holding her off with the other.

'What a roll!' he said. '*What* a roll! Dime-a-dance business must be good.'

'Gosh, Crusher, how strong you are!' she squealed. 'I guess there's nothing much wrong with you. You'll be wrestling someone your own weight soon, won't you, hahn?'

She wanted to believe it, so she did when he let her go and said gently: 'Yes, baby. I'll be out of here before long.'

'And you'll be wrestling again soon?'

'I expect so. It is kind of a habit I have got — wrestling.'

'You're telling me,' she giggled, and began repairing her makeup again. She found the blue comb in a crease in the bedspread and ran it through her light, dry curls.

He had picked up the velvet box now and had opened it. The stone in the ring was nothing to the one Mike Prelgousky had given her, but there was a clear fiery flash from it.

'You're not wearing your ring,' he said in his soft, hoarse voice.

She stammered through her speech. She seemed to feel the scornful black circles turned on her from the other bed. Crusher did not look at her. He looked out at the river and played with the things from her bag. She kept her voice low.

If she could have talked louder she could have made it sound better, she thought.

After all, Crusher did not seem to care much. He took it quietly. He even looked at Mike's picture without getting sore. Said Mike was a good-looking guy. Which Mike certainly was. In spite of being a Pole. And so short . . .

Crusher wouldn't take the ring back. Keep it, he said, for a wedding gift. Have it set in some other form, or keep it to pawn. A piece of ice is always handy for that, he said, laughing and sounding like himself. It's a nice pebble, he said turning it so it flashed, then tossing it to her, and wishing her luck.

She put it back in the box and began to pick up the things off the bed and jam them back into the bag. Her hands were shaky. She broke a finger-nail, caught it shutting her compact, and swore a little. She need not have been so nervous.

'Pour yourself a glass of water,' Crusher said. 'The glass is clean. I have not drank out of it.'

'I would not of cared if you had,' Velma Libby said, and went around to the other side of the bed and poured it out.

'Is there any crews out on the river?' he asked.

It was nice of him to give her a chance to look away. Crusher was like that. Thoughtful. She looked out, though, and told him there wasn't one in sight. She finished the water and put the rest of the things back into her bag.

'Kiss me good-bye, Velma,' he said, and she did, not saying anything about how the bristles scrubbed her cheek. Mike shaved twice a day, otherwise he would have had five-o'clock shadow of which the magazines and Velma did not approve.

'Good luck, Crusher,' she said. 'And plenty of falls — for the other guys. You'll always win, I bet. I bet.'

‘The last fight I had I have won,’ he said.

She knew that, of course. It was coming home from it he was run over. She and Mike had been to see it. Mike had made half a grand on it. He’d believed her when she told him Crusher was honest and couldn’t be bribed.

‘Well, good luck,’ she said again. She went away without looking at the blind man or speaking to him.

It was not until she was on the train that she found she had lost her bottle of Sommevol tablets.

Chapter 27

PIRACY IN MUDDTIME

THE NEXT DAY was the one that Peter always called the day of the Lobanov kidnaping. What else, after all, can you call it when a talented young painter — a Prince too, don't forget that — is walking along Paul Revere Square wondering darkly whether he would feel any better if he kicked the Statue, is invited to go for a ride in a vehicle that looks as if it could not stagger a hundred yards, and suddenly finds himself in Vermont? Well, anyway, Peter called it kidnaping. He also, in one of his bitterer moments, called his self-appointed chauffeur an unscrupulous, domineering, impulsive pirate.

He was wrong about this. Diana was not impulsive.

She had in fact taken considerable trouble about this expedition.

There seemed nothing sinister to Peter about it at first. He was walking along entertaining the dark and heretic thought already mentioned, when he heard a grinding rattle behind him. It was punctuated by a hoarse yap that made him turn his head as the car grated to a stop and stood panting.

ing beside him. Its first seven years had left their mark on it. The bumpers were tied on with clothesline, the windshield was stayed with surgeon's plaster, the outer handle had gone from one door and the inner from another, but it had a valiant air. Someone had lavished blue paint of an electric shade upon it; enlivened it further with scarlet wheels. A scarlet stripe wobbled gallantly around it. The leather on its sagging seats and what was left of its chromium plate shone gaily in the spring sunshine.

It was the loveliest of days. Even Peter morosely recognized that. It lent the car a certain misleading charm. And it did not exactly disfigure Diana.

She looked, Peter decided sourly, as pretty as if she had endorsed a cigarette and had been lithographed in full color. There was a good deal of pale gold about her — her hair and her sweater and her skirt; and of brown — her hat and her shoes and her eyes; also of dull gold — in the shadows of her hair and the dancing lights in her eyes, and in a rough tweed coat lying on the back seat. A sort of peachblow pink cropped up in the coat every now and then and in her cheeks too.

'You look like a goldfinch sitting on an American flag,' Peter said in a cross voice. He scowled too, but she did not notice it, or mention that he had avoided her ever since that preposterous scene in the library. With the idea of preventing her from referring to it he went on hastily: 'Where did you get this object?'

'You mean Chippy Hacky?'

'What?'

'My husband, Chippy Hacky. He bites.' Diana explained helpfully. 'The name of my new car. A literary allusion.

To the works of the author of "Peter Rabbit." You wouldn't know — being a foreigner.'

'Oh, it's a *car*!' Peter exclaimed. 'Thanks for telling me.'

'Get in,' Diana said.

Peter put his foot over the door and got in. They rattled out of the Square, chugged fearlessly into the traffic, neatly performed evolutions that took them over the Pepperpot Bridge.

Diana explained that she had bought the car to end the depression. Someone, she said, who did not already own a car had to buy one. She was a patriot. Having no car, she had bought a car, the ultimate car, the car that unlocked all transactions up to the shining, stream-lined monster at the other end; the key in the log jam, in short — Chippy Hacky. For thirty-seven and a half dollars.

Peter said she had paid too much. They disputed this point until much of the Mystic Valley Parkway had stuttered away under the wheels.

'It will save train fare to Vermont,' Diana asserted.

Peter exposed this fallacy.

'Not for one person. It's always cheaper for one person to go by train.'

'Yes, but there are two of us. There's your fare too,' Diana said, putting Chippy Hacky into an amazing burst of speed.

'But I'm not going to Vermont.'

Peter repeated, loud enough to be heard above the tires kissing the concrete, and the fenders and bumpers shagging toward each other, and the conscientious puffing of the engine, and the jack under the back seat saying harsh words to the wrench, that he was not going to Vermont.

'Oh yes, you are. *And hold on to your hat!*'

Peter held on to his hat.

They did the next ten miles in silence — if anything connected with Chippy Hacky can be described as silence. Peter looked for red lights. They were all green. He looked for policemen. The policemen had gone home to lunch. He hoped for a puncture, but proud were Chippy Hacky's tires such a precious freight to bear. They bore it past hotdog stands, through the fried-clam zone, past the castle walls of Methuen, under the private overpass for cows with one perfect Jersey posing on it against the blue sky, up the hills behind Manchester.

The air began to freshen. Clouds sailed higher. There were plowed fields and shadowy masses of purple against the horizon. Trees near Boston had been veiled with a haze of buds and new leaves. Here they showed an etched tracery of twigs against the sky. Across the valleys the dark pine plumes floated out of a violet mist.

He might, Peter knew well enough, simply jump out of the car in a soft spot, but he was not really much in earnest about escaping. Somehow the fog of boredom and weariness and self-hatred of the last week was lifting.

Snow topped the hills above the blue glitter of Newfound Lake. Streams went rushing with a roar that quieted Chippy Hacky's voice. Diana told Peter their names politely.

Peter had vowed himself to silence and stuck to his plan — more or less. Unfortunately Diana did not seem depressed by his reticence. She drove with extraordinary skill; he could not help noticing it. The little car never went very fast — the effect of speed was chiefly the noise and rush of wind — but then it never had to slow down. It skirted holes and

frost heaves neatly; sent the curves flowing behind it as smoothly as satin off a new roll. Diana sang as they coasted down the long hill into Orford. She had not much of a voice, but Peter was obliged to admit that she hit the right note. Her singing and driving had a gay effect, rather like a young bobolink practicing song and flight all at once.

The Connecticut was too full to be noisy about it. There were patches of snow on the rocks that frowned above it on the Vermont side. Every twig on the elms showed in the quiet mirror of the river.

Diana swung Chippy Hacky across the long bridge and headed north.

'Well, we're in Vermont,' she remarked unnecessarily.

Peter stopped being a Trappist, became instead a cross small boy. Slumped in his seat, hands thrust in his pockets, he said, scowling, 'I suppose you think this is funny.'

Not at all, Diana said. Since they were engaged they ought to be alone sometimes. It was impossible to have any privacy in Paul Revere Square, so she had planned this little trip. As a surprise.

Peter growled that so was it surprising to step on a tack. And that they were not engaged. He looked as if he were afraid Diana would take advantage of their comparative solitude. There was no one in sight but a farmer leaning on a hoe and a last year's scarecrow leaning on a rake. And three unscared crows in a spruce. And a woman hanging a quilt on a line.

He need not have worried. They had turned into a dirt road and Diana was busy choosing the best pair of ruts for the negotiation of a mudhole quite a lot smaller than the pond in the Public Garden. Peter hoped they would be stuck

in it, but Diana had chosen the right ruts. They churned through it, flinging liquid mud around the landscape. They were not stuck in any of the seventeen succeeding mudholes either. Mudtime was early this year.

As they crossed the Orange Mountains, Diana asked politely if Peter liked the country.

'I don't know,' he said. 'I never saw any country before.'

'Never saw any before?'

'Well, you can't call Palm Beach country.'

'I thought you'd been in Switzerland.'

'Switzerland isn't country. It's scenery,' Peter told her.

He had forgotten to scowl for several miles. It was impossible for Peter to be consistently disagreeable. He sounded only slightly peevish as he remarked that he had no toothbrush.

'You can buy one at Wilbur's store,' Diana told him.

'Not without money.'

'Haven't you any money?'

'Left my wallet in my other suit.'

'That,' said Diana, 'will save me the trouble of stealing it. I'd planned how, but it would be more ladylike not to. I will buy you a toothbrush myself.'

'Where is this store?' Peter asked nervously.

'In East Alcott.'

'You say that as if you meant "It's in the promised land."'

'Oh it is, it is,' Diana assured him.

East Alcott is a crossroads hamlet high on the slope of what in some states would be a mountain. In Vermont it is a hill. Peter was shown East Alcott from across the valley. From there it was chiefly some splashes of red, some cubes of white, and an ochre-colored oblong. The ochre color was the paint,

hardly fifty years old yet, on Wilbur's general store. The barns were not only red — the only proper barn color — but one of them was sixteen-sided and the other circular.

They both had cupolas (pronounced cupalōs in East Alcott) and the silos near them were only slightly less magnificent. Sam Wilbur owned the circular barn. He lavished white paint on the cupola and gold paint on the ram on the weather vane. For the last ten years he had been thinking of painting the store, but there had been a difficulty about it. Bertha wanted it white to match every house in East Alcott except the Red Cottage. Sam wanted it red to match the barn. In the meantime the yellow ochre with maroon trimmings continued to repel rain and snow and hail and sunshine with customary efficiency, sometimes all in one day.

Chippy Hacky took the hill gallantly. Wet clay slithered under his wheels. Stony gullies opened in front of him. Frost boiled out of mudholes and ran merrily in patterns that would make a snake dizzy. The little car snorted along without complaint, surmounted whalebacks of bare rock, drove in and out of a field that was dryer than the road — as much as chocolate soufflé is than chocolate sauce — and at last panted into the swamp in front of Wilbur's store.

Its arrival caused little commotion. The leaner and lankier of the two horses hitched to the rail switched his tail and kicked without much conviction at the ancient buggy behind him. The fatter of the two men tipped back against the wall in the spring sunshine opened one eye. Seeing only some city folks he closed it again. Like the unusually warm weather, city folks were out of season. It was bad enough to see them in June.

Sam Wilbur, a man of few words, had apparently used most of his daily quota.

He said only, 'Pleased t' meet you,' when Diana said that this was her cousin Peter Lobanov.

Sam's head and handsome features made him look dignified even in his faded blue jeans and shapeless brown coat. He was shorter than Peter, who was no giant, but his powerful shoulders and arms made short work of handling crates and barrels.

Some people say he could pick Bertha up and carry her upstairs — if he had a mind to. Others maintain that he could not. A third group — mean-spirited neutrals — take the ground that maybe he could or maybe he couldn't, but anyway look at the stairs! Pesky, narrow things curling up out of the front hall like a shaving. Bertha can barely get up them. Has to turn sidewise.

She sleeps downstairs in the state bedroom near the front door — the one with the sunburst quilt on the maple high-posted bed. She hardly ever goes upstairs, and there are some who wonder whether the hired girl ever gives the rooms up there a real going over. Still there was no dust — that you could see anyway — when the Relief Corps met there last fall.

Whatever Bertha Wilbur's faults might be, lack of heartiness was not among them. All Vermonters, Peter discovered, are not tongue-tied. He felt suddenly warmed and soothed by this vast woman with the bright blue eyes and bright brown hair. His crossness at having been carried off by Diana into this mudhole vanished suddenly. Mrs. Wilbur laughed at something he said and he realized that he had been witty. It was not a loud laugh, considering her size. It was more like a rather mild northwest breeze on a Real East Alcott Day.

This was the end of one of those days. The wind had

dropped, leaving the elm carved in brown against clear blue. Purple light began to move up out of the hollows of the hills. The sun slipped behind Crouching Lion's shoulder, threw a pink flush on his forehead. The sky changed to pink, to gold, to pale primrose, to a brightness without color, the mountain dark against it.

The stage rattled in. It creaked and splashed mud. Lights went on in the store. The occupants of the porch stirred out of their slumbers and went into the store yawning. Stars came out and shone in the water in the ruts. People began to come for the mail: small boys in rubber boots; women in clean print dresses with fur-collared coats over them; men in leather jackets. April evenings are cold in East Alcott, even on a day too warm for the season.

The stove drew them with the red glow behind its doors of mica, with the cheerful roar under its domed top. Smells of damp wool and barns and fields mixed with the store flavor of kerosene and cheese. Bertha Wilbur sorted the letters with her big soft hands. She filled the little post office completely. The boys could see pieces of her through the windows of the boxes. They were bright squares with small flowers like pieces for a patchwork quilt. Bertha had a pleasant way of giving out letters; as if she were a hostess for the United States.

It did not take seven minutes to dish up supper after she had left the store. Peter was not hungry, as he had told Diana with frigid politeness when she had offered to buy him a sandwich. It was annoying having no money, as he had discovered when he had contemplated jumping out of the car and hiking to the nearest railroad. He had often been told by his mother that a man should take all the things out

of his pockets at night and lay them in neat rows on the bureau. He began to think there might be something in it, only, somehow, he really wasn't much annoyed. He might as well be here as anywhere.

Confronted by Bertha Wilbur's corn muffins, by fluffy baked potatoes, by salt pork with sour-cream gravy, by pools of new maple syrup — in East Alcott they eat syrup out of a saucer with a spoon — by apple pie and hunks of devil's-food cake, by big pitchers of warm milk and three other kinds of cake and thick cream and home-canned raspberries, he managed, in Bertha's phrase, to make out a supper. And he slept, in a nightshirt borrowed from Sam Wilbur, in the prim clean room under the eaves, as he had not slept for weeks.

Diana had bought him a toothbrush. It gave him that homesick feeling best produced by the unfamiliar curve of a toothbrush and a newspaper in a strange city, but he scoured his teeth cheerfully just the same. His image in the wavy mirror with the pond lilies painted on it convinced him that he was not the type for a toga. He cast aside the flowing folds of Sam Wilbur's nightshirt and splashed himself with icy water from a pitcher with brown roses on it. He did not splash the wall because there was a splash protector behind the washstand. It had sparrows and bulrushes embroidered on it in red.

A New England primitive, Peter decided, running his hand over his chin.

Diana's generosity had not extended to a razor.

'I'll grow a beard,' he threatened, 'and sweep it up over my ears. Quick, Dmitri, the vodka . . .'

He applied water to his obstinate hair and smoothed it down with his hands. It had already won out by the time he reached the dining-room.

Sam Wilbur padded through the kitchen in his red socks. He had left his barn boots outside the door. He set a pail of soapsudsy milk on the table. He washed his face at the kitchen sink and combed his hair in front of the mirror in the case of the dining-room clock. He looked at his Saturday shave and decided it would do. Perhaps he had noticed Peter's new beard. He acknowledged Peter's good morning with a benign nod. There was an appraising twinkle that kept the kindness of the look from being merely the glance of general benevolence that Sam might cast over a field of growing crops, or on a child playing with a kitten.

The shrewd gleam lighting the benignity gave Peter the feeling that a small bright searchlight was turned on him, on his life, on his work. Oddly enough it did not increase his sense of futility, or his bitter resentment at having let life make a fool of him, or his shame at his inability to get himself out of the net in which his mother had entangled him.

Peter had suddenly a sense of well-being and competence. He would find Diana and end this ridiculous situation. Weakness had got him into it, had kept him in it. As he ate his second stack of griddlecakes with Bertha Wilbur's breezy comments in his ears and Sam's shrewd look turned on him, he felt suddenly strengthened. It was an unreasonable feeling. Nothing had happened to justify it, but it was as actual as the sound of Sam Wilbur inhaling syrup.

There was no place for Diana at the table. She was still asleep, he thought, with the complacency of the early riser.

'Miss Jocene is not down yet,' he remarked.

'She's went,' Sam Wilbur said, clouding dark amber coffee with yellow cream.

'Gone out somewhere?'

'Boston.'

'Gone to *Boston*! And left me here? Why, she can't do that to me.'

'Has. Seems so.'

Sam Wilbur did not look at the angry young man. Sam stabbed his fork into a potato in a white dish near Peter, dug out the hot fluff, mashed dried beef in cream into it.

'But what shall I do? I can't stay here. I've no money even to buy food.'

Peter had pushed his chair back. He was standing up now. So was his hair. As usual he had pulled at it in his annoyance. Since he always looked like a cross kitten when he was angry, he was not impressive.

Sam Wilbur was not impressed.

'Painter?' he inquired between mouthfuls.

'Yes.'

'Paint the store. Needs it. Board you.'

'I don't paint buildings. I paint pictures.'

'Steve Jocene painted pictures. Painted my silo too. Steve,' said Sam Wilbur in a burst of eloquence, 'was a *good* painter.'

Bertha Wilbur intervened with a last leaning tower of griddlecakes and the information that Diana thought her cousin would be real good. When he got the hang of it. She thought it would be a nice change for Peter. She'd had the idea because of her father. He always said outside painting kind of rested him. She'd thought Peter might like to help in the store too. 'She's coming back for you,' Bertha concluded soothingly, 'after a while.'

Peter bit off a growl. There was no need of being rude to the Wilburs. They had not kidnaped him.

‘If you could cash a small check for me,’ he said to Sam Wilbur, ‘I could go. I haven’t my book, but I suppose you can let me have a blank check.’

Sam chewed slowly on his last four cakes, finally said with a nod in the general direction of Boston, ‘She wouldn’t approve.’

‘We promised Diana we wouldn’t give you any money. Not till she comes back. Of course we’ll pay you for your time. Thirty-five cents an hour and your board,’ Bertha Wilbur said. ‘She wants you should stay and we’ll be real glad to have you. We never had a Prince before,’ she added, with her jovial laugh. ‘It’s kind of cute to think of a Prince painting the store. We’ll have it white, Sam.’

Peter listened dizzily to the Wilburs discussing the color of the store. The argument was twenty years old, but they went at it heartily, Bertha with jubilation, waving the white banner with green trimmings; Sam with quiet obstinacy nailing the maroon and ochre ensign to the mast.

Take three coats of white, he asserted.

Two and a touch-up, Bertha said, would do. With a little black in the first one. It was remarkable how much black you could put into white and it would still be white compared to anything dark-colored. Same as a white lie looks kind of light-complected till you put it up against the truth. Wasn’t that so, Prince?

Peter liked the way she called him Prince. It sounded as if she might be speaking to the Newfoundland pup, a dog like a black pony, only curlier. The pup spent a good deal of time trying to get into Bertha’s lap. In this he showed good judg-

ment, Bertha's lap being the only one in East Alcott suitable for a lap pony. Bertha slapped him genially and called him Duke.

'We're all royalty around here,' she announced with a chuckle. 'Come on, Prince. I'll give you some overalls and brushes. Now, Sam, stop jabbering about those colors.' (Sam had breathed two words: Maroon. Ochre.) 'Ethan Allen mixed 'em and we lost the receipt. Besides, we got the white and green. I was aiming to surprise you, but you might as well know. It seems Diana's come into a little money. She gave the paint to us. Come on, Prince.'

Prince Peter Lobanov, formerly of the Moscow Lobanovs, and of points, north, east, south, and west, including Paul Revere Square, came on. He put on overalls and a cap suitable for a jockey. It had 'Wilbur's General Store' embossed on it. He carried ladders. He pried up the lids of cans. He mixed paint with a paddle cut from a shingle. Bertha Wilbur told him how.

He listened meekly, but his meekness did not prevent him from mentioning Diana unfavorably.

'What did she do it *for*? Why should she drag me up here and leave me?' he asked, standing up suddenly and letting the paint run down the paddle. 'I'll walk home. Hitch-hike. I don't have to stay here and paint.'

'You got the cans open,' Bertha Wilbur observed sensibly. 'Don't let that paint drip on your shoes, Prince. Keep stirring. Don't you like it here?'

Peter looked out the barn door across the browns and grays and purples of the landscape. Spring had touched it, though a stranger could hardly read the signs. Yet even Peter could feel that the awakening would come soon. He could feel it in

the soft brush of air against his cheek, in the soft eyes of Jersey calves pushing their heads through the fence. He could see it in the pieces of blue looking-glass in the puddles; hear what the crows were saying about it.

‘Yes, I like it,’ he said slowly. ‘I just don’t like being dragged up here because she gets a crazy idea in her head and has to do it in the next five minutes. Too sudden.’

‘’Twasn’t so sudden,’ Bertha Wilbur said. ‘Must be a week ago she wrote and said she was bringing you up to paint the place and to get the paint. Of course I let her have it wholesale.’

‘You mean she planned it more than a week ago? Why, that was before — why, it makes it all the worse.’

Bertha Wilbur said there was no pleasing a man. First Prince didn’t like it because Diana seemed kind of hasty and now he was mad because she was foresighted.

‘But men never did have much logic . . . Get down, Duke. Don’t lick the paint. It’s bad for you . . . Put in a little more black and some turpentine, Prince. Besides, she didn’t mean to leave you. She meant to stay and help paint. It was something she heard on the radio.’

‘What was it?’

‘She didn’t say. There’s a little set in her room. She had it turned on awhile. Early this morning, just when Sam was getting up to milk. She knocked at my door. Said she had to go to Boston early, because of some news she’d heard, but she’d be back for you and you could paint the store, and not to give you any money.’

Even after he read the paper he could hardly see why she needed to mix herself up in this particular affair. It wasn’t as if she knew Nick well.

Chapter 28

LIGHT

PAUL REVERE SQUARE was naturally upset. The publicity was painful — those headlines about Crusher Magee's death, his will (an ill-expressed document), the talk about the operation on Nick Joceleyn's eyes. There was something indecent about it: a Joceleyn owing his vision to a dead wrestler, one who had once had a paper route in the Square. The Square did not feel precisely that it would have been better for Nick to have stayed blind, but it did seem that the whole thing might have been presented in a more dignified way.

The words 'Double Corneal Transplant' — first a phrase having a sort of respectability simply because no one knew exactly what it meant — became sickeningly familiar. Even the *Transcript* dug up the picture of Nick helping Madame Chiang Kai-Shek into a plane. For once it found no space to mention that she was a Wellesley graduate. The picture was mostly helmet and a blurred profile. Nick had a way of turning his head as the camera clicked. No one of the pictures raked out of the files showed him full-face. The one

with his arm in the sling came the nearest to doing so, but even in that the eyes were turned away. It was hard to see any resemblance between that strong figure, caught always in motion, and the quiet man fingering a page of Braille; harder still to think of him in the dark, waiting.

Naturally Eben was annoyed with Diana for going to Sidney (Crusher) Magee's funeral. Eben still regarded Diana as his property. Her engagement to Peter was nonsense, as he would show Peter as soon as he got home. The blue-and-silver giant only looked morose and said Prince Lobanov was out of town. Peter certainly wasn't a very devoted fiancé, Eben thought. Peter ought not to have been out of town while Diana was making herself conspicuous at wrestlers' funerals. The only woman there. And giving her name.

She ought to have said it was Smith. Well, no, perhaps not Smith. No one would believe it, seeing Diana. Something non-committal. Jackson, say. Or Richards. And why did she have to say that the Jocene family felt grateful to the dead man? That Mrs. Jocene would have come herself, but that she was with her son. And that she — Diana — had a great respect and admiration for the wrestler? Talking like that! To reporters! Why, any child knew better.

Under this official annoyance, voiced freely to all who would listen and to others who did not, lay buried in Eben's mind a deeper uneasiness hardly defined even to himself. Yet the questions it raised kept thrusting themselves up into his mind. How did she know this wrestler except by visiting Nick in the hospital? Visiting him often? Sitting beside him? Reading to him? That voice of hers... Nick wasn't deaf... And this Magee would tell Nick how she looked.

Already, Eben thought, with a strange feeling that pricked his skin and burned in his throat, Nick would have been using the dead man's eyes. Disgusting, gruesome . . . And if the corneal transplant were successful . . . even one eye . . . He had crossed Nick off, but . . . Well, Eben still had a weapon. Fortunately it would do for Nick as well as for Peter for whose benefit it had been prepared. Bill Shatswell, Eben shrugged off. Then — for he was always thorough — he thought he had better just mention it to Singleton, who could be trusted to spread it. He must see him soon.

Suppose the stock market . . . Pump priming . . . That wild man at Washington . . . But not too soon. He must tell Nick first. As soon as Nick was well enough.

Eben telephoned the hospital every day.

Eleanor Joceneyn was with her son when they took the bandages off his eyes.

The doctor said: 'Count my fingers, please. How many am I holding up?'

There was a strange electric silence in the room. Then Nick said, in a voice that sounded as if he had been running: 'Four on the left hand. Three on the right.'

'Fine,' the doctor said, 'fine. Back into the darkness now with you, sir, but we'll have you reading before you're much older.'

He talked some more, tactfully, while he was putting on the fresh bandage, to hide the fact that Eleanor Joceneyn was crying. She was doing it very quietly and she stopped almost at once. It hardly counted against her, the doctor decided. She had been a good sort through the whole thing . . .

His last weeks in the hospital were the hardest of all for

Nick Joceneyn. Although there was, he told himself, nothing to look forward to, he was impatient to leave. He would not go back to China. His job, such as it was, had been taken by someone else. Probably he could have a plane and drop bombs on people, but he could not do it, even if they were Japs.

Something strange had happened to him in his months of darkness. He no longer wanted adventure. He wanted a life of order: something where he was at a desk at nine o'clock and left it at five. Something clean and decent and humdrum. He did not think it was just a desire to keep his skin whole. It was more that he had been too young for his age for a long time and had suddenly grown up. He was sorry he hadn't done it in time to help his uncle. It was too late now. Joceneyn & Company wouldn't need him. Even his old room in the Square was closed to him. He would never go back to it. He might not have a job and his money was practically gone now — when he had paid for the operation there'd be just about nothing left — but he'd have his eyes and his self-respect. He'd find something to do. When he didn't feel so tired . . .

This feeling of being fit only to be thrown on the ash heap would pass, like other feelings in their time; like the horror he felt when he first realized what Crusher had done. That was lightening now, changing slowly from being an intolerable burden to something that was only painfully sad, painfully beautiful. There were times now when he stopped his endless checking and rechecking of that last day to find some point at which he could have seen into his friend's mind and have stopped him.

Yet how could he have known about the Sommevol tablets

taken from Velma Libby's bag when even the nurses with their eyesight and efficiency had not found them? Of course he had realized that Velma had thrown the wrestler over, but that had not seemed an unmixed blessing to anyone who had heard Velma's voice. Probably she was pretty, but he knew she wasn't beautiful. Beauty was something you could detect more easily without your eyes than with them. Crusher, he had decided, was well rid of the girl. But Crusher had concealed from him two other blows that had fallen on him that day: the letter saying that the trucking company and the insurance company would do nothing for him, since he was clearly at fault in the accident; the doctor's verdict that he would never walk again. If he had only told instead of sitting there covering those pages with his curiously neat, prim handwriting . . .

As Nick's eyes healed, there came with the healing an acceptance, not only of the gift of sight itself, but of Magee's letter. It began to seem possible now to receive the sacrifice as simply as Crusher had made it; as if the matter were as straightforward and natural as his friend had tried to make it seem. Yet even read by Eleanor Joceleyn's voice it had been hard to accept at first.

You see it's this way, Nick, I am going anyway. I suppose I am acting yellow, but too much has happened and I cannot take it. Do not think too hard of me about that. I just cannot see living in a wheel chair and on charity for maybe forty years. I am on my way out anyway, like I said. You have been a good pal. Do not think I do not know about how you have paid for my room these last two weeks so I would not have to go in the ward.

You see the trucking people have decided it was all my fault and they will pay me nothing without a lawsuit, and the

trouble is I guess they are right because I was jay-walking all right trying to get quickly to where I had promised to meet [something scratched out] a friend of mine. So there is no use in going to law and I have told that sticky little ambulance-chaser so and I have paid him what he said I owed him for doing nothing and there is enough left in my wallet to pay the hospital. It gives me some pleasure to know that that great legal brain did not kid me into thinking he could get me one hundred grand. I am not so dumb as I look and I do not owe anyone anything. It is something to start in like I did with nothing and have a good time like I have had and come out even. Now I have not got much to leave anyone, Nick, but if I had, say, an old overcoat that you could use I would want you to have it and wear it without feeling that I would ever want it back. It is the same with my eyes. I am through with them, so you take them, pal, and use them. And when you see anything pretty like one of these crews on the river digging whirlpools and the sun flashing on the wet oars and their backs going all together, well, figure we are looking at it together, see?

I have found out your eyes were ready for the operation and I have written the doctor to explain things to him and not to tell you till after you are well. Also I enclose a note to Miss Joceneyn to thank her for bringing me the flowers and that swell basket of fruit and listening to me talk. It was a pleasure to meet her and Miss Desmond and your mother. I have not seen many ladies to know them, but those three are the real article I figure. Be sure you fix it so they do not feel bad about this. I was going anyway.

So good-bye, Nick, and good luck.

CRUSHER

Nick had said he would not go back to Paul Revere Square. He stuck to it — until after Bill's visit.

Bill was a relief. He never tried to be tactful. He did not

avoid the subject of the operation, or of Crusher Magee. Bill was as simple and straightforward as Magee himself. He remembered the paper boy who had jumped over the railings and he had seen Magee wrestle. He hadn't known they were the same person, though. Wished he had. It was the girl throwing him over that gave him the final throw, Bill thought. Though having seen her picture, Bill felt it was hard to understand. He would sooner meet a barbed-wire fence while he was jumping a stone wall, he said. He added that love was queer anyway. There was Polly moping around. And he had felt a bit off his feed for a week after Diana turned him down, only now he was getting over it. And probably Polly would in time. Only of course it was harder. When you'd played store with somebody. And kept his pet snakes for him when he was hauled off to Palm Beach, and mixed his paints, washed his brushes . . .

'What *is* all this about Polly?' Nick asked.

'You didn't know Diana was engaged to Peter?'

'You mean that Peter's thrown Polly over and is engaged to Miss Joceneyn?'

'Right, and very neatly put. It's a secret, of course. The secret everyone knows.'

'I wouldn't think it of — Peter.'

Bill did not notice either the distaste in Nick's voice or the little pause before Peter's name.

'I expect,' he said, 'that dear Aunt Sophia put the thumb-screws on him. She always knew how pretty well.'

Nick agreed to that. Princess Lobanov was born a few centuries too late, he said. In Spain around 1492 she would have been a knock-out.

Bill said she was a knock-out anyway. Always ready with

the rabbit punch. She was the kind that would dope somebody else's horse. If she were a wrestler she'd gouge eyes.

Even to Bill this figure of speech did not seem tactful as he heard himself say it. He stumbled out an apology. He was a clumsy oaf, he said.

'Don't bother,' Nick said gently. 'I'm not going through life quivering over those words.'

He looked, however, white and tired.

'When do they let you out of here?' Bill asked.

'Tomorrow, I think. If the doctor's satisfied with me.'

'What you need,' Bill said, 'is a week's hunting.'

For several reasons Bill's prescription was not practical. Instead, in spite of his resolution, Nick found himself back in his uncle's house. His mother assumed that he would come and was so happy over it that when it came to the point, he couldn't hurt her.

It wouldn't matter for a little while, he told himself. And as Diana was now engaged to Peter, no one could think now that he came because of her money. Perhaps, too, in his old room this weary sense of not belonging anywhere in the world would lift.

It increased rather than lessened with the healing of his eyes. Strangely, his months of darkness began to seem like a time of peace, of refuge. He had been surrounded, he realized now, with patience and kindness. If he had known no other world than his hospital room, he would have been certain that it was a room where kindness ruled.

Perhaps, thinking over what he had known, East and West, kindness, personal kindness, did rule. Certainly it was the commonest human trait. Only next commonest was — cruelty. Which you would find uppermost you could

never tell, in the light. Collectively it was often cruelty. In the dark it was likely to be kindness. Well, that was something to have discovered.

Another gift of the dark was honesty with himself. In the light he had always acted without weighing motives. The dark had given him time to know himself. During those long hours he had assessed his strength and weakness. So he was honest in admitting that he was going back to Paul Revere Square because he must see her once, the girl with the velvety voice whose clothes had a faint fragrance of may-flowers. He had heard descriptions enough of her — from his mother, from Burwell, from Singleton, and from — Crusher. It was easy, if you had plenty of time and darkness, to lead people to talk about Diana. You didn't have to ask questions.

Only somehow, in what they told him, the skinny, funny little girl with the pigtails and the wistful gaze, as she pulled off smoked glasses to look up at him, was gone.

Chapter 29

USEFUL INFORMATION

HE KNEW IT WAS SHE before he saw her. There was nothing strange about that. He had known her footstep since her first visit and there had been seven visits in all. Even a moron could have learned that light, quick step after seven times of hearing it coming down the linoleum. And hearing it going away.

He was in his uncle's smoking-room in the dark, lying on Nicholas Jocene's sagging old sofa. His eyes couldn't stand light yet for any length of time. He had his hands cupped over them. He jumped to his feet as she came in. She drew in her breath sharply and switched on the light.

He stood there, dazzled, shading his eyes with his hand. It was only for a moment that they faced each other in that strange silence. She pressed the switch again and the light went off, but he had seen her. Rockets and comets stung against his eyelids. They faded, but her face was still there.

No one, *no one*, had told him anything about her.

She said in the low, velvety voice he remembered: 'For-

give me, please. I was startled, hearing someone move. I turned on the light without thinking.'

It was all right, he said.

His voice sounded hoarse; caught in his throat.

'I'm glad you have come,' Diana said.

There was something healing in the simple phrase. He stopped feeling like a wild animal frightened by a flashlight. The beating of his heart stopped hurting his throat.

He opened his eyes again.

There was light coming in from the hall. Her figure was only partly dark against it. There was a white-and-silver mist around her, a silver mist with dewdrops in it. Around her head the light drew a line of pale gold.

'Thank you,' he said at last. 'I'm glad to be here.'

'Will you shut your eyes again a minute?' she asked. 'I left my latchkey here somewhere. I'm afraid I can't find it without some light.'

'All right,' he said, but did not shut his eyes, only shaded them from the glare.

He watched her while she hunted for the key. Her dress sparkled as she moved. She found the key — too quickly — and turned toward him.

She had not expected to meet his gaze, but she did so gravely, quietly, for a long second.

At the end of it he said: 'I heard of your engagement only yesterday. I hope you and Peter will be happy. I'm glad he's had some good luck. He's had a pretty thin time. I'd like to congratulate him. Is he coming for you?'

'Thank you. No. He's — out of town just now.'

She could smile, he noticed, without moving her lips. The smile was in her eyes; danced there for a moment. Her mouth kept its grave sweetness.

'Bill is taking us to see some motion pictures — slow motion — of race horses. And then dancing. He's educating me. A civic duty, he says. While Peter is away.'

'Is he coming back soon?'

'I don't know exactly. He has some painting to finish.'

'A mural?'

'Why — yes. It *is* a mural. How did you guess?'

'He told me he was trying for some competition for one. What is it? W.P.A. project?'

'No. It's private work,' Diana said truthfully.

Thinking of Peter slapping white paint on the walls of Wilbur's General Store she couldn't help smiling, really smiling this time with the dimple showing. Nick liked Clare Desmond, but he wished she hadn't come in before he found out about that smile. Clare looked handsome, Nick admitted. Most people, seeing Clare in flame color, might not have noticed Diana. But flame color hurt his eyes. Diana's cobwebs on the grass with dewdrops was definitely restful, which was, of course, why he turned them back to her.

Bill, who came in behind Clare, seemed to have no difficulty in looking at flame color. Bill looked particularly glossy and magnificent and earnest. The horses' heads under the crystal of his waistcoat buttons looked no better brushed and clipped and curry-combed than Bill. It is greatly to Bill's credit that he preserved his well-groomed air, when you consider that his children had pursued him across the Square in their pajamas and that he had just rescued Priscilla, kicking and clawing from the railings. One of the spears had caught in her jacket — a lucky circumstance, for otherwise she would have continued her quicksilver course. Dan, luckily, was easy to catch. When Priscilla had dragged him

into this particular bit of mischief, he had been reading 'The Scotch Twins.' While Priscilla was being separated from the railing, Dan had settled down on Miss Lucinda Popham's steps under the lamp-post and was continuing his studies. Naturally he had brought his book.

Bill had had to go back and put on a clean collar, he said. He added that the kids ought to be turned out to grass. It was natural for colts to kick up their heels. And it was no use trying to ride Prissy with a curb and a martingale. She was a good little filly, not an ounce of vice in her — a snaffle was plenty.

Clare, who understood these remarks, agreed with them.

As for Dan, Bill went on, he was glad to see him showing a little bounce. After he had been chivvied off Miss Popham's steps, he had cantered between Aunt Sophia's footman's pale blue legs and made him drop his leash. All in all with wolfhounds running around loose and the footman catching his blue trousers on the fence and tearing quite a promising barn door in 'em, it made it seem like Old Times. He hadn't seen so many heads sticking out of windows since the day he and Nick tried to tar and feather Eben. Only they had to use molasses, having no tar and only one small pillow... Did Nick remember?

Nick did remember. Singleton, who had appeared during this excursion into time past, said he wished he did. He had just seen Eben, which was why he was late. He thought a little tar and feathers would do Mr. E. Joceneyn Keith good.

He did not amplify this statement. He looked at Diana in an odd way, as if he were not sure just what he might see in her face. Whether what he saw answered his question or not, he turned away quickly and took Nick's hand in his iron grasp.

He would probably be able to use it in a week or two, Nick said.

Bill told him that he had tickets, bunches of tickets, for this show, the lecturer being a pal of his, and wouldn't Nick come? And how about his mother?

'Thanks a lot, Bill, but my eyes aren't quite up to it yet. And Mother has a client who probably wants to tell her all about her new grandson and how the cook left the ice-chest open and then was very impertinent. And when she goes I'm thinking of hiring Mother for about half an hour myself. I might,' Nick said, smiling, 'tell her about my Trip Abroad.'

Nick was glad, when they had left, to slip back into darkness. It was a little, he thought, like being a ghost. A ghost would, he supposed, find the real world painfully *unreal*. It was strange to Nick, this world where people went to lectures in boiled shirts and black broadcloth, or in silk flames, or clouds of white and silver; where they danced, no doubt, to braying and squealing noises and watched shadows flickering across a sheet of silver and crystal. The whole thing seemed somehow more shadowy, less real, than his dark world of shape and texture and scent and sound. People who had eyes knew the world with only a small part of their minds. Before he was blind, he had heard people say that blind people's senses became keener to make up for losing their sight.

That wasn't it. Your sense of hearing was no better, but you used it; learned things from it. How the wind sounded different in different trees. The stir of a mouse in the wall. Water being poured from a thermos jug. Pills, too many pills, dropped into a glass . . . But he wouldn't think of that just now . . . It was the same with your sense of space and touch. You were not distracted by the appearance of things. You

learned about them accurately with your finger-tips and muscles. Someone might look at a magnolia and say, 'It has pink flowers — ice-cream flowers.' A blind man would find out more with his fingers.

Not that he wasn't grateful for his eyes — for more than one reason. For instance, there was Eben's call. It was a long time since he had seen Eben, but Nick had not forgotten that sure sign that all Eben's cousins knew — the pulse throbbing in his thin forehead that meant Eben was up to something. A blind man could not have seen that. Eben's voice, so far as Nick could remember, occasionally shutting his eyes under the shadow of his hand, was as dry and precise as ever. His pale brown eyes had their old impersonal look. His pale brown skin kept its healthy, even tint; no blush or pallor disfigured it. His thin lips had only their usual complacent twist. Yet there was the telltale pulse beating away: like the track of a mole, burrowing.

It was natural, Nick soon realized, for the pulse to beat; for Eben was the bearer of evil tidings. He had always enjoyed the rôle. ('You flunked your German, Nick. I got a look at the grades. So you're off the team. Too bad... You've got a smooch on your collar, Bill. And didn't you have a ticket on Star of War? Well, he fell at the water jump. Tough luck... Your mother's annoyed, Peter, because you took Polly to that dance. You know you told her you couldn't take Grace Miggs because your ankle was bad... Of course, I didn't tell her... Stop twisting my arm, Nick. Mr. Robinson's coming. You know how he feels about bullying... No, Mr. Robinson, I wasn't doing a thing, just standing here...')

The pulse always beat throughout all these encounters, and

it did this evening as Eben said, 'I hope you're well enough, Nick, to hear something a trifle disturbing.'

'I shall have to be, I suppose,' Nick said quietly, his eyes on the burrowing mole, or was it a water snake, swimming? Well, never mind . . .

'I have said nothing to Bill,' Eben went on, 'because after all he never had a chance. And then Bill must have money from his wife. It isn't like you or me, Nick, who have our way to make. I heard about your losing your father's money and it certainly is tough luck, but anyway you don't need to be let in for something awkward. We're in the same boat and have to make the best of it, I suppose. Though a little capital would have meant a lot to me right now.'

This was typically Eben — this mysterious-confidential style.

Nick would not, he decided, ask the question Eben wanted asked. He sat quiet, his head turned away from the light, shading his eyes with his thin hand.

Eben was obliged to stop talking or to say something. What he said was: 'Have you been reading the stock-market reports lately?'

'I haven't,' Nick said politely, 'been reading anything lately.'

Eben showed no annoyance over this obvious quibble, but said patiently that he meant, of course, if someone had read the reports aloud to him. He assumed that since Nick was ill, they hadn't, because they were very distressing. In view of their uncle's will.

'You mean that the assets have shrunk and the bequests won't be paid in full,' Nick said.

'Some of them will. The ones to my mother and aunts and

to the servants and some annuities come ahead of everything else. But this million for Diana is just so much smoke. She'll have this house, of course. But it will be just a white elephant. I doubt if you even get your five thousand dollars, Nick. It's a shame,' Eben said. (That was why he had come, of course, for the pleasure of telling that.) 'I've said good-bye to what he left me.'

Nick said nothing and Eben went on: 'The market's slid a long way since the will was made. I'm an executor, you know, with Clifton. At least I am in theory. I advised him to start selling things immediately, but he was in favor of waiting. You know how trustees are: buy at the top — sell at the bottom. And it isn't, of course, just the market. There was this crazy scheme of making Joceneyn & Company a profit-sharing affair. The whole thing's a mess. I believe,' Eben said, remembering his difficulties with the tea-bag filling machine, 'that there's sabotage going on. Machines out of order. People loafing on their jobs. Half the employees haven't paid anything on their stock and the rest wish they hadn't. I knew it wouldn't work. You can't change human nature. And the customers are claiming our tea isn't up to standard, which is nonsense. We're putting out a very good grade — considering. You can see what the whole thing's doing to Uncle Nicholas's fortune. I thought you ought to know, Nick.'

'Why?'

'I — I thought it might make some difference to your plans.'

'Why, so it does,' Nick said. 'Of course.'

'And I wondered if you thought I ought to tell Peter.'

Eben wished his cousin would not hide his eyes. It was im-

possible to tell anything about Nick unless you saw his eyes. His voice sounded almost amused, but his mouth did not show it. Eben was satisfied, though, that he had made an impression. Nick's air of composure was his way of showing off. People were mostly show-offs, Eben considered, but they had different ways of doing it. Nick's was always the boy-on-the-burning-deck style, but the news about the money would scorch him a little, no matter how cool and casual he seemed.

Nick's coolness made Eben use his best piece of ammunition.

'And when you think that if that girl hadn't turned up, you'd have had the Tea Company, Nick!'

'What do you mean?'

'*So that stings, does it,*' Eben thought, and went on sympathetically: 'Why, you were residuary legatee and got fifty-one per cent of the Company in his old will. Didn't you know? I wouldn't have ——'

'Thank you for telling me now, Eben.'

Nick's quietness couldn't fool Eben. Nick was sizzling inside all right: sounded as if he'd been down the headwall in Tuckerman's the first time.

Eben made a few more thrusts and went. Not that he wasn't enjoying the evening, but he had not finished his appointed round.

His interview with the Princess was satisfactory too, and much more dramatic than the one with Nick. The Princess had no use for repression — it was one of her Slavic days. She said what she thought of Follingsby Clifton in a style that needed only a knout to make it completely effective.

When she was out of breath, Eben told her that it would be better not to say anything to Mr. Clifton just now.

'I suppose I ought not to have told you so soon. It's probably not legal etiquette, but I thought you ought to know. On account of Peter,' Eben said.

The Princess purred that Eben had done exactly right. She patted his arm — a gesture that made Eben back nervously into a gardenia plant and ask hastily whether he should tell Peter or leave the matter in her hands.

'Telling Peter,' the Princess groaned, 'is not so easy, since I do not know where he is. I believe,' she said, with an angry sparkle of her green eyes, 'that it may be he has eloped already with that adventuress. In which case we are ruined.'

Eben said that they had not eloped. He had seen Diana only that afternoon. And he was obliged to say — generously — that he did not consider her an adventuress. The fault was his uncle's. When people were quixotic, it made trouble. It had put Diana in a false position. He had explained that to her and she had said she was glad to be out of it. She was going to get a job. He might find her something in the Tea Company.

Eben's last sentence was drowned by Princess Lobanov's Slavic scream of 'It is not that you have *told* her? Eben, you are a fool. You are *more* kinds of fools than I ever thought there were! Do you not see,' she said, walking toward him with such a threatening air that Eben backed away again, into a rosebush this time, 'do you not see that she will *cling* to Peter now? He is a Prince, is he not? And my heir. Or she thinks so. Although, of course,' said the Princess more calmly, 'I can disinherit him. I have just put him back in my will. I can take him out again. For his own good. Why, the little Shatswell would be better than this. Bertram is bound to leave her something.'

Eben did not like being called a fool any better than someone would who was really a fool. This surprised him a little as he realized it. However, he wasted no time in speculation about it.

He simply said with frigid courtesy: 'I am sorry you are annoyed, Aunt Sophia. I have done what I could.'

As indeed he had.

Chapter 30

SURPRISE FOR PETER

WILBUR'S GENERAL STORE had never in its hundred years of existence looked so spick-and-span. Its new white and green dazzled the eyes. Even the white of lilac plumes and the dropping apple-blossom petals looked a little dingy beside it. New grass paled beside the green glare of doors and shutters. Only the blanket of white ground phlox on the rocky bank really competed with it.

Chippy Hacky bumped over what had been the mudhole and now was a series of iron-hard billows. One of the sleepers on the porch opened one eye. Seeing Diana he opened the other, perhaps as sincere a compliment as she had ever had. He said they needed rain. Perhaps it was needed to float him off the porch, Diana thought. Apparently he had been there since she left. It must have been hard work painting around him. She agreed that they did need rain, but she did not promise to do anything about it.

She went in to find Sam.

It was not Sam's Roman head and shoulders against the

bright tapestry of canned vegetables. This storekeeper's head came up rather higher, as far as the cans of Green Label Beets in fact. He had a fluffy bush of light hair that looked as if it had never known scissors. He was a sunburned young man, judging from the back of his neck. He wore a blue work shirt and new blue jeans. He was stacking red and white cans of soup in neat pyramids on the shelf above the beets. He had his back turned to the store and he was singing loudly.

‘Vive la commune de Paris,
Ses mitrailleuses et ses fusils,’

he shouted cheerfully, juggling cans into place.

Diana did not interrupt this flow of melody. She listened while he declaimed about breaking the gullets of the bourgeoisie. She tried on a Frank Buck helmet (twenty-five cents), a Hoover apron, pink-and-blue-flowered (seventy-nine cents), and a jeweled cowboy belt (thirty-nine cents reduced from fifty). She had just added the belt to her costume and was unwrapping a Starry Bar (chocolate, butterscotch, cream nougat, peanuts, five cents) when the storekeeper turned and saw her.

He dropped three cans (for a quarter) with a crash, stood for a moment with his mouth open, then vaulted over the counter, upsetting an Eiderdown Flour Baking Set (thirty-one cents), swung Diana off the floor and kissed her heartily, knocking the Frank Buck hat over one eye.

Diana straightened the hat, put the Starry Bar into the mouth of the red-headed urchin who was looking on with his mouth watering for just such a combination of calories and vitamins, and said severely : ‘You mustn’t do that.’

'Why not?' inquired Prince Lobanov, brushing some Eiderdown Flour off his blue jeans. 'Aren't we engaged?'

'No,' said Diana, 'we're not.'

'Then,' said Peter, 'I certainly must kiss you.' He did, on both cheeks, and added: 'You may keep the hat and the belt — for a disengagement present. The apron I'll have to have back. Lilla Lyons is making up her mind between that and the green one. You'll have to pay for the Starry Bar. I can't have it get around that we give them away.'

Diana paid for the bar. She put the apron on the right hanger on the clothes-pole. She put the Frank Buck hat back on the pile and hung the jeweled belt over the bar with the others.

'I can't accept presents, especially jewelry, from anyone to whom I am not engaged,' she said primly. 'I would give you back your ring, only somehow I think you forgot to give me one.'

'Mother was having the earrings the Czar gave my grandmother reset,' Peter said. 'Emeralds, if I remember. And about a pint of diamonds. Gaudy but neat. She'll be annoyed.'

'She will not.'

'Why not? Were you changed in the cradle? Has the Rightful Heiress turned up?'

'No, and if she had, she wouldn't be an heiress. Peter — that ghastly money — it's evaporated. There isn't any more!'

He was quiet, looking at her, his sunburn turning pinker.

'Eben told me. He's an executor, you know. It's something about the stock market and the Tea Company. He'll explain it to you. He takes a ghoulish pleasure in it. I'm

afraid I annoyed him because I didn't feel worse about it. Still he's practically promised me a job. Filling tea-bags. With a machine of more than human dexterity. That is, in case you were not true to me. I told him I was sure you would be, Peter. Only, I said, I am going to release him. It wouldn't be fair, I said, to take advantage of Peter's natural chivalry. Eben agreed that it wouldn't be fair. So now you can go back to Paul Revere Square. It's perfectly safe.'

'I'm not going back,' Peter said. 'At least not to stay. Just to pick up a couple of things. I'm staying here. I like it.'

'But, Peter, what are you going to do? Not painting. It's awfully uphill work to make a living painting in East Alcott. Even buildings.'

'Painting, phooey. I'm going to keep store. Sam Wilbur's had a sharp attack of something — the prevailing distemper they called it in the East Alcott items in the *Clarion*, but it was an awful lot like pneumonia. He says he won't spend another winter in East Alcott. He's going to Florida — in a trailer. Imagine Bertha in a trailer! She says if she gets stuck in it she will claim she's a fugitive slave and sue Sam under some amendment. The thirteenth, I think.'

Diana laughed, and Peter went on: 'I'm buying into the business, out of my wages. Sam's going to see me through the summer. Of course it would be easier if I had some capital. I'd counted on Uncle Nick's legacy, but I'll get along. I always wanted to keep store, but Mother was set on my being a painter: so refined! Though what the Joceneys were but storekeepers, I don't know. And the Lobanovs were farmers when you come right down to it. I'm going to be a farmer too, on a slightly smaller scale. Did you notice my

garden? I've got peas up that are an inch taller than anyone else's. And I can milk. Even Bertha says my hands are good for milking.'

He held them out. They were always strong-looking hands even when they were painting eyes in cocktail glasses. Now they were calloused and stained with pitch.

'I've been chopping trees, evenings,' he said. 'These hemlocks and spruces creep right into the pasture and the sugar place if you don't get after them. Have you ever been up there when the thrushes were singing?'

She had, Diana said, but not for a long time.

'I'll take you there sometime,' said Peter kindly.

'Let me show you Vermont, by Prince Peter Lobanov, a native,' Diana remarked.

Peter grinned. Then he said seriously: 'I'd like to show it to — Polly.'

'Why don't you?'

'I don't know what she thinks.'

'I do. She thinks you're the only man that ever walked the earth.'

'She must be crazy,' Peter said, blushing. 'I mean — doesn't she mind? About us?'

'She knows that was all nonsense,' Diana said. 'I told her.'

'She wouldn't believe me when I told her.'

'Well, she does now.'

'Do you think she'd mind it here? I expect it's lonely. In the winters. Do you think she'd ——'

'Why don't you ask her?' Diana said.

'I can't, unless I rob the till. Sam hasn't paid me yet. He obeyed your orders.'

'Take Chippy.'

'What?'

'Back him up. I'll put in the gas. A tank full. Engagement present. Sam will let me charge it,' Diana said.

'Who'll keep store while I'm gone?'

'I will. I'll get somebody. Don't worry. I'll fix it with Sam.'

It was fixed in a surprisingly short time. Peter filled the woodbox, telephoned to Boston, visited Sam's bedroom, came out with the first money he ever earned in his pocket, drove off in a golden haze of dust.

It was hard to believe that it was Peter. The Peter she remembered was sulky when he was serious, bitter when he was gay. She remembered him at his mother's table leaving his brook trout *meunière* untouched on his plate, crumbling bread, stabbing idly at spun sugar and *marron parfait*, making a meal of two olives and a *demitasse*, a meal that gave him plenty of time to breathe sarcasms about the guests. This sunburned young man, who seemed to have grown too big for the clothes in which he had come to East Alcott, who had stood looking at her affectionately as he wolfed down what he referred to as a stirrup cup of chocolate cake, was someone entirely new.

There were moments when Diana almost regretted giving him back the Frank Buck hat!

She thought about him and Polly as she turned back Bertha's snowflake candlewick spread, as she propped up the window with the notched stick, as she drew in a long breath of the sharp, sweet air, and took one last look at the stars through the apple blossoms.

'At least,' she thought, burrowing in under the log-cabin

quilt, the sunburst quilt, and the double wedding-ring quilt, 'Uncle Nicholas's money did some good before it vanished.' Then she went to sleep and forgot Paul Revere Square — almost.

It was pleasant to run downstairs the next morning into a cloud of pungent flavor — coffee and bacon, frying perch, and graham gems. She put her arm nearly around Bertha Wilbur's waist and kissed her pink, soft cheek. She kissed Sam, who was up for the first time, on the bald spot in his white hair. She picked up three yellow kittens and kissed them behind their rose-petal ears.

At breakfast the Wilburs spoke kindly about Peter, but they did not say anything about his buying into partnership with Sam. Diana did not ask them any questions. They would tell her when they were ready. Otherwise questions would meet with evasive answers; evasive answers to direct questions being a Vermont specialty along with maple butter-nut fudge. Sometimes evasive questions were a help, but Diana had long ago found out that Vermonters were a lot smarter at indirect answers than she was at indirect questions.

She realized, while she was keeping store, that she had said nothing to Peter about coming back for her. She really needed to be in Boston before long. An expert on Chinese porcelain was going to be in town and had written asking to see the Joceneyn Collection. It was fairly well arranged now: that is, as well as she could do it without more real knowledge. She knew she must have made mistakes and this was a chance to clear up some of them.

She must be in town by Friday at the latest and she really wanted to be there Thursday to dust things. (And on

Wednesday — she wouldn't think about Wednesday.) There were certain pieces that her uncle had always dusted himself. Even Burwell had not been allowed to touch them. She kept seeing the peachblow vase with a thin film of dust over it. It was still in her room. She had kept it there because she liked to start the day by seeing the light change on it. There had never really been any dust on it. She was glad she had had it as long as she had. It would have to go with the rest of the collection, of course.

She had meant to speak to Nick Joceneyn about it again, but somehow in those few moments the other evening she had forgotten that she had ever been a curator of porcelains — even an imitation one. Well, anyway the porcelains were genuine — she supposed.

It was surprisingly easy to slip back into life in East Alcott. Paul Revere Square began to seem like an image in a camera finder — a small patch of red brick and white paint floating on a blue-gray river. Tiny dark figures moved through it, moved as puppets do without touching the ground: Princess Lobanov with the white dogs quivering under the lash of the scarlet whip; Mrs. Shatswell in red velvet, pink-faced, a sort of shy female Santa Claus who might vanish up the nearest chimney; Polly Shatswell, with eyes as sad as a friendless dog's suddenly changing and shining with happiness.

Paul Revere Square changed from being a camera image and became simply eyes — all looking at her. Bill Shatswell's moved slowly in his happy, red face. Sing's scornful black gaze became friendly. Eben Keith's pale brown ones were a little like a lobster's. At least they weren't really, but they made you think of feelers — as if they touched,

coldly, the thing at which they looked. She felt with a little shudder that they touched her even here. Yet even Eben had been kind about the job in the Tea Company.

Peter's gray-green look she had encountered only yesterday. It had changed since she had last met it. The eyes themselves were still like those of the three wild little tiger kittens that hid in the rosebushes and came out on the doorstep only to take up the serious business of chasing their tails in the sunshine. Kittens could look serious and frivolous and innocent all at once. So could Peter. Kittens never looked either responsible or sympathetic or grateful. Peter had looked all three. He was a man now.

Of those eyes that she had seen only for a moment in the study, she tried not to think at all. She would not see them again. And Wednesday . . .

She thought: 'I shall dust the peachblow for the last time and start filling tea-bags. The golden age is over, and I'm glad.'

She sounded a little too defiant even to herself. She was not really glad about the Jocene Collection. Would it have to be sold? Or stay in the cellar of the Museum where no one could see it? She didn't know what happened when people left bequests and not enough money to pay them.

As for her, she'd be all right. There was still the little annuity, and Mr. Clifton had given her some money. She had paid Burwell what she owed him and had bought Chippy Hacky and, for Clare Desmond, the flame-colored evening dress. She was glad of that extravagance. She hoped she wouldn't have to pay Mr. Clifton back the money, but he wouldn't have given it to her if she hadn't been entitled to it, she supposed. It was only that there wouldn't be any

more, or hardly any. It didn't matter. The vanishing of the million dollars was like a weight falling off her neck.

'I wonder if he knew when he saw me,' she thought, and then turned her mind resolutely from that second when she had first met Nick Jocene's eyes. She might as well forget. Someone in New York had offered him a job, a tea importing company there. He was going — Wednesday — if the doctor pronounced him fit to go. Unless Peter came soon, he would be gone before she got back. ('He' had become, though she hardly knew it, only one person in her thoughts, and it wasn't Peter.) He was going, so it did not matter whether, when he looked at her, he had thought that she was a potential heiress or a probable tea-bag filler.

'Doesn't matter in the *least*,' she told herself, shaking off the feeling that a cold hand was shutting slowly, tightly on her heart.

'I'll clean the store. There's dust on those packages of soda. I'll have to read Peter the riot act.'

She conducted a miniature riot of mopping, sweeping, and dusting. She worked so hard that her arms ached and her ankles felt weak. Her cheeks were flushed and she was hot, yet somehow she still felt those icy fingers slowly closing.

Chapter 31

TOO MANY TELEGRAMS

'I THINK I'LL GO UP in the barn and look at Father's pictures,' Diana said. (Tuesday was the name of that day. Monday had dragged along somehow. Tuesday was moving even more slowly. She wasn't really expecting Peter any longer. Although if he *should* come before dinner, they could still start back and get to Paul Revere Square before dark. The days were so long now. After all, it was only a six hours' drive. Five and a half if Chippy Hacky's tires held out. But Peter wouldn't come of course . . .)

Bertha Wilbur piled snow on gold, opened the oven door, tested the heat with her elbow, fanned cool air into the oven with a white apron like a new sail.

'Guess that meringue won't scorch now,' she said. 'There, I dropped my dishcloth: that means company coming . . . Why, Prince took those pictures with him. Stopped at the barn and got 'em last thing. I thought you knew it. Come to think of it you were in the store at the time. He said he

was going to have 'em framed. But there, I guess I hadn't ought to tell you. Likely he meant to surprise you.'

'He has,' Diana said. 'And when I see him I'll surprise him. Of all the flutter-headed, interfering ——'

'You haven't quarreled with Prince, have you, Diana?'

'Not yet. But when I get a chance ——'

Bertha Wilbur said soothingly: 'Now don't be hard on Prince. I know you expected him back kind of earlier, but he had things to see to down there probably. Something might have come up. It was real good of you to stay and help with the store, Diana. I don't know what we'd have done without you. But now we got Ed Robbins to help, you start back any time. Not that we'd like to see you go, but we can spare you. For a while. I kept the Red Cottage swept up good. All you got to do is turn the key. You'll be up to stay, I hope, before long.'

'It looks nice,' Diana said. 'I went in last night.'

She did not say that she would soon be standing beside a machine that combined tea and cotton cloth into that alluring device that her uncle had spoken of as the mouse in the teacup.

Bertha Wilbur harked back to the subject of Peter.

'Prince has lots to learn about storekeeping, but I must say he's got the knack. It's something you're born with or without. Same as red hair and spelling. He's got a nice manner with the customers. Common — I will say for him, Diana, that in spite of being a Prince he's just as common as you or me — and yet he won't stand for the store being a place for rowdiness any more than Sam would. And he knew right off that Byron Merrill wasn't the kind to give credit to.

‘I heard him say the first time Byron come in — I was sorting the mail and Prince waited on him and he said — Prince did — “Road work getting on all right up Logtown way?” “I wouldn’t know,” Byron said, “because I ain’t had only one day’s road work this week. There’s favoritism,” he says, “hiring folks, and when I see the Road Commissioner, I’m going to tell him a thing or two.”

‘He was not drunk, but I guess he had lifted his elbow more than once and not with any pickaxe in his hand. So Prince says right away: “I got a couple of slips here for you, Mr. Merrill. Comes to \$1.78.” Byron give him the money too. And did not ask for any more credit. Paid cash for tobacco and a ten-cent pineapple coconut cake. Though how he can live on that bakery truck... Now, I say that was smart of Prince. He knew enough not to give anyone credit that hadn’t had only one day’s road work. Oh, he’ll make a storekeeper all right. Now don’t you quarrel with him, Diana.’

‘The first chance I get,’ Diana said inflexibly.

‘Well, you got one now,’ Bertha announced from the window near the sink. ‘He’s just drove into the yard. What did I tell you when I dropped that dishcloth? He’s got someone with him. A girl. And a man with black glasses on.’

It did not after all seem like a good time to quarrel with Peter: not with Polly there with her arms around Diana’s neck, and Peter saying: ‘Break it up girls. I want Mrs. Wilbur to meet Polly. This is Polly Shatswell, Mrs. Wilbur. Don’t bother to learn the name — it’s going to be Lobanov, just as soon as Judge Wilbur is ready.’

'He's changing his shirt now,' Bertha Wilbur said. 'He's been watching for you.'

'And this,' Peter went on, 'is my best man, Nick Jocene. You already know the maid of honor. She's that kidnaper over there. You want to look out for her, Nick.'

The tall man had taken off his glasses and was shaking Bertha Wilbur's big warm hand, smiling at her with a look that Diana had never seen — a look of gaiety and friendliness. In a moment it was turned on her and she saw that there was in it, too, a sweetness that turned the icy clutch around her heart into a warm, gentle clasp, hardly distinguishable from the touch of his fingers on hers. It was gentle, but strong, the sort of touch with which a strong man might hold a small, fluttering bird. Was that a bird fluttering in her breast? In that second while his hand touched her, she did not know.

She knew only that, with the disappearance of her uncle's money, fetters seemed to have fallen off them both. They had always belonged to each other. She had known since that first evening when she had told him about his uncle's death; before he had gone down to the library to hear the will read. She let herself remember now — she had shut away the thought before, except sometimes when she was looking at the peachblow vase, how in his grief for his uncle, in the fevered darkness in which he was moving, he had reached for her hand and held it as if, drowning in the dark, he had found a drifting plank to support him.

She had soothed him somehow, strengthened him; she knew that she had. He had seemed, as he went down to the library to meet his cousins, poised and calm. And from that moment she had loved him. Only — the Midas touch had

turned her to gold and he had fled from her as if she were a contagious disease.

But that was over. It was only a bad dream now. With his blindness and the money, his pride had vanished too. She knew it had gone whenever she met his eyes across the table at Peter's wedding breakfast. And when Peter and Polly had at last gone away together to the small red house among the lilacs — swept and ready and they need only turn the key — he would tell her. They would climb down to the waterfall among the maidenhair fern, where she used to hide when the members of the Women's Club came to condole with her about Stephen's death. She had carried much joy and sorrow to that green and brown solitude. She would like him to tell her there. Only it wouldn't really matter where he told her. In the store beside the pile of Frank Buck hats. Right here in Bertha's golden-oak dining-room. It didn't matter — as long as it was soon.

There was never, Peter said, such a wedding breakfast. Never such a chicken pie — so golden-brown and insubstantial above, so white and solid below, chicken pies in general being pallid above and dark beneath. ('Nonsense, Prince, it's just three four them young roosters. I didn't hardly think I cooked enough. I set eggs real early this year, but they're awful scrawny still.') And the asparagus! Who ever ate asparagus that had practically pole-vaulted from the garden to the stove? ('Well, Sam has always had an awful good asparagus bed, but I don't hardly think I put enough butter on it. Slap on a little more butter, Princess. I churned yesterday. Have some vinegar and sugar for your lettuce, Mr. Joceleyn. Prince grew it himself. Earliest anywhere round.') The watermelon pickle was so

good he'd like a third helping, please, and some of the rhubarb and strawberry conserve, and just a dash — half a pound or so — of cottage cheese — you must give Polly a lesson, Mrs. Wilbur. ('Why, I'd be glad to, but I hope she'll make a better batch than this. Somehow the milk didn't sour quite quick enough. It's just a mite rubbery. I do hate cottage cheese to creak when you chew it...') As for the lemon meringue pie — words failed him.

'You must have known I was coming,' Nick Joceneyn said in that tone that set the bird fluttering his wings close to Diana's throat now. 'I believe this pie was made for me.'

It was, Bertha Wilbur assured him. It was the last thing Prince had said when he telephoned and she asked him about the dinner — Prince could call it breakfast if he liked, but he'd be having breakfast a whole lot earlier than two o'clock if he was going to be a storekeeper — he said lemon meringue pie was his best man's favorite dessert. But if Mr. Joceneyn would stay a few days she'd make him one with a higher meringue. She guessed she must have been stingy with the eggs.

'If the meringue were any higher, the pie would float away, and what good would that do anyone?' Nicholas Joceneyn asked.

Even when he talked about pies, his voice was thrilling. If he had recited the alphabet, it would have set Diana's heart beating again. His voice blended in her mind with the sound of water rushing over the falls in the green coolness: clear brown water with green shadows in it, lashed suddenly into white foam; water that had in the tumbling depths a deep-toned sweetness, in its shallows an eager ripple. It chuckled happily around boulders, sang over pebbles among forget-me-nots. And it wasn't far away...

She hardly heard the talk around the table. She knew Peter was telling how clever he'd been to surprise her, how he'd made his plans and how everything had fitted. It didn't really matter just when he had telephoned, so long as they were all sitting together at the table now.

There was a sacramental quality about the meal. Sam Wilbur, thin and transparent-looking from his illness, so carefully shaven, so neat in his dark blue serge and the stiff white shirt and collar, turned a benevolent look on his four guests. He was proud and pleased that he had married his young partner to that nice plain girl — no nonsense about her and good help for Prince; keep him steady. Sam's look had kindness and simplicity, yet there was shrewdness in it too.

He might have posed for a statue of Justice with Bertha at the other end of the table representing Peace and Plenty. They supplemented each other as married people ought to do: as Peter and Polly did already. It was strange to see that even in their half-hour of marriage Peter had grown more manly, Polly less brusque.

Only what, Diana thought, was there for her to give Nick, who had in himself all sources of strength? Why, nothing, not even that golden weight that had been around her neck; not even eyes for him to see with. But what of it? She would be, somehow, of some use to him. She would be better than she was capable of being. She would learn the last and best generosity and free him from any need of generosity; go to him empty-handed, let him do the giving. And she would let him be free; let him take his eagle flights over the world, if he liked. Fly above the clouds while she stayed below, waiting, watching, like that first day. She

wouldn't try to hold him safe in a stuffy house . . . except for a little while . . . and soon . . .

'You're not eating anything, Diana. Let me get you a cut of apple pie, if you don't care for the lemon,' Bertha Wilbur said.

She became conscious that she had been sitting there with the fork in her hand. She didn't know how long. She began to demolish the sunset-tipped mountain peaks.

'I must learn to make lemon pie,' she said, and then blushed because she met Peter's mischievous green-gray eyes.

She asked hastily how he had managed to elope from Paul Revere Square without everyone's knowing.

'We didn't,' he said. 'The Square knew it perfectly well, but it looked the other way, knowing it wouldn't have to send presents. You look disappointed, Diana. Is it because you yearn to think of us leaving the Square pursued by wolf-hounds? Alas, for Romance! Even the Dowager (since 1:15 P.M.) Princess Lobanov said it would be economical to elope. She did not say for whom. She just told us we should thus avoid the set of silver match-boxes with our initials, the stream-lined cheese set, the framed photograph of Whistler's Mother, the Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs cocktail glasses. Wasn't that what she said, Polly?'

'No,' said Polly.

'So she gave Polly that clump of emeralds and diamonds that you see on her finger just above that plain gold band. She — er — happened to have it in the house. Nifty to wear at the dishpan. The seal ring I am wearing is something Polly — er — dug up for me. This is called the impressive double-ring ceremony.'

'She gave us ten gallons of gas too,' Polly said.

'And her blessing. She even said that I might have done worse. She feels,' said Peter, 'that I have had a Narrow Escape From an Adventuress.'

'I wish,' said Polly wistfully, 'that anyone had ever thought I was an adventuress.'

Her husband said, 'Now, Princess Lobanov, aren't you enjoying your elopement?'

Polly said that she was, but that didn't interfere with its being monotonous always to be known as a good sensible girl who lived on the same side of the Square.

'Well,' Peter said, in a burst of chivalry, 'if it's going to make you feel any better *I* think you are an adventuress. Who was it who had the enterprise to get copies of our birth certificates and send them to East Alcott by Air Mail, Special Delivery? If that wasn't adventurous!'

'It only got here a day later than the regular mail,' Bertha Wilbur said.

'That was Sing,' Polly told them. 'He went down to City Hall for the certificates as soon as Peter telephoned to him. He didn't even consult me. That's how romantic I am — like a sack of potatoes. Sing's grown another inch. He's planning to start an Ice-Cream Bar; says there are millions in it if you work it right...'

It was after five when the telegram came. It had been telephoned to the store from Piedmont. Young Ed Robbins, who was helping at the store came hurrying over with it. He had written it down on a gray slip that had WILBUR'S GENERAL STORE printed on it in red.

'I guess it's good news,' he said, with eyes full of doglike

adoration turned on Diana. He had known her two days now.

Diana did not say whether it was good news or not. She got up quietly, saying that she must answer it, and, followed by Ed, went back to the store.

‘You know it was kind-a-funny,’ Ed remarked, striding after her — it was queer how quick she could walk when she had a mind to; he could hardly keep up with her quick step — ‘you know they sent that telegram twice. Except they got your name wrong on the second one. I couldn’t hear Laura’s voice good. When she said the first name, I mean. I got the Jocelyn all right, but the first name sounded some like Nickala. It began with N. anyway. I didn’t bother no more to ask Laura to spell it out, because I found it was the same message over again, seems so. She was mad me asking her to spell it over. “N for Nincompoop,” she says. “Who’s the nincompoop sending a message twice?” I says. If she was not my third cousin I would tell the Telephone Company. She did not speak with a smile in her voice, and she said very sharp that she supposed she could deliver it in person. She always had lots of time, she said. I come as quick as I could with it.’

‘Thank you, Ed. I’m sure you did,’ Diana said.

She had reached the office now. She started to pick up the telephone. It rang under her fingers, and she put the receiver to her ear.

Ed was weighing out prunes for a customer.

‘This telegram is for Peter,’ she called to him. ‘I’ll take it for him.’

‘I’ll answer mine later,’ she added to the boy after she stopped writing.

Laura Wilbur, who was Sam's niece, was still talking.

'I'm awful glad for you, Diana, and for Prince,' she said.

'Thank you, Laura. I'll tell him and I'll see that he gets the message. Yes, it's funny about the second message . . . Yes, perhaps you'd better read it . . . Thank you . . . I suppose Peter'll get a lot of telegrams now. Congratulations, you know.'

'If there is, I'll bring them up when I go off duty. And copies of the other two.'

Ed had time to wonder, as he tied up the prunes, if Diana felt bad about Prince getting married. She looked awful white as she went off with the two slips of gray paper.

Chapter 32

WINDING ROAD

SHE BEAT DOWN her sense of hurry and desperation, forced herself to walk the short distance to the house, forbade herself to look back over her shoulder for the figure of Ed Robbins waving another gray-and-red slip with the name *Nicholas Jocene* clearly written on it this time. For Laura was too efficient to let that idea about Nicholas and Diana being the same name get by for long. As soon as she heard the name of Peter's best man . . .

Any minute now someone might tell her. Any minute now someone might drive into the Wilburs' yard to comment on that other piece of news. Just to be neighborly. And anyway when Laura went off duty . . .

Diana allowed herself to kick savagely at a dandelion's golden face, but she was calm as she came back into the kitchen. Polly was wiping glasses while Bertha washed them. Peter was putting them back into the cupboard.

Her voice, Diana thought, sounded casual — or almost

casual — as she announced that she must start back to Boston.

‘It’s late to start, Diana,’ Bertha Wilbur protested. ‘Stay tonight and get off early in the morning. Aren’t you going to get Prince and Polly’ (Polly had already ceased to be Princess. She couldn’t live up to it, she said. Four hours was enough!) ‘settled in the Red Cottage? Why, it’s knee-deep probably. You’ll have to hoe it out, likely. And while you’re hoeing, Mr. Joceneyn can see the farm. Climb the hill and all. No, sir, it’s no mountain. Just a hill, but the view is about the *neatest* view. And I got a room ready for you. It’s a pity for Mr. Joceneyn to turn around before he had seen anything of East Alcott and he must be tired. Do stay, both of you.’

No, she must be there early in the morning, Diana said. It was business. Mr. Joceneyn could stay and go by train when he got ready, unless he would trust himself to Chippy Hacky.

She couldn’t keep the note of desperation entirely out of her voice. It sounded in her ears like a breathless plea for help instead of the light tone she had intended. How it sounded to Nick Joceneyn she could not tell, but his own voice did not seem entirely steady as he said: ‘I — I might be handy tying your car together. I hope you have a ball of string along.’

She always carried one, Diana said.

She walked upstairs, instead of running, instead of dancing, but she wasted no motions over the packing of her bag. Things were jammed in anyhow. She heard the big clock in the hall wheeze the half-hour.

(Hurry! Hurry! Laura goes off duty at five-thirty. She’ll

be up here. Asking questions . . . Is there someone named Mr. Nicholas . . . ?)

She had meant to copy out the message for Peter, but she did not dare wait. She had only pretended to write it down. She would mail it to the Red Cottage. He and Polly wouldn't care whether they had it or not. Not tonight.

She was glad she had hung the new chintz in the living-room, and arranged the last apple blossoms and lilacs and the first tulips on the dining-room table, and left the new toaster and the percolator plugged in, and the fire ready to light. It was her way of saying: 'I told you so, children. I planned it this way. Don't think you surprised me *much*, you darlings.'

She was glad she had snatched every minute she could spare from the store to fix it for them — the little house where she and Stephen had lived together. She had paid off the mortgage on it. She was glad there was still some furniture left. She only wished she had bought more.

She regretted nothing she had bought: not Clare's red dress, nor Chippy Hacky, nor the Red Cottage. She had meant it for vacations, skiing week-ends, to lend as she was lending it now. Perhaps, now that she was poor again, she could afford to stay in it a long time . . . not alone . . .

She caught her breath partly because of her hurry, partly because of a sense of perilous sweetness, so close, so fleeting. If she were late . . .

She walked sedately down the stairs, however, said, somehow, all the right things, waited without twitching her eyebrows or tapping her foot, or tinkling her switch keys while Sam finished telling Nick about the East Alcott murders. Sam so seldom embarked on conversation with a stranger

that she would not interrupt him. Apparently he did not regard Nick as a stranger. Nick had a listening face. As he stood, leaning easily against the pillar with a curtain of woodbine swinging its tendrils behind him, with his dark glasses dangling from his thin fingers, completely absorbed in a fifty-year-old murder, he reminded Diana for the first time of his mother.

It was a delightful faculty, that of losing yourself in someone else's words so completely that you became for the moment only the instrument on which the speaker was playing, sounding for him the notes of pity, of mirth, of horror. It was, however, a difficult trait for Diana to appreciate just then.

From where she was standing she could see down into Piedmont Center. The small green spot outside the yellow cube of the telephone office was Laura Wilbur's car. Any moment now Laura might come out. After that it would be only five minutes, seven at the most . . . Luckily Sam's style was terse.

The door of the telephone office opened. A pink figure came out. Laura, undoubtedly. Pink was her color: had been before she weighed a hundred and eighty-three. Was so still. Laura had one idea at a time. The pink figure disappeared into the green car. Nick was shaking hands with Sam Wilbur, with Bertha, with Peter. He stooped and kissed Polly just above the right eyebrow.

The green car started, moved along the white ribbon of Piedmont's concrete road, turned off on the dirt road, disappeared under the brow of the hill. There was still time, if he got in now . . . now.

He got in, Chippy Hacky's starter coughed, whinnied,

balked a moment, then leaped into action. They were out of the yard, dust followed them down the road under the maples. There was still a cloud of it hanging in the air when Laura Wilbur's green car passed the fork where the hill road turns off. Laura did not notice the dust especially. There was plenty of it on the daisies and red clover. She was intent on laying out Ed Robbins. She had checked up with Boston and there were two telegrams: three, counting Prince's, each with the most exciting message that had ever come to East Alcott. And this Nicholas Jockey — he was Peter's best man. She had heard Mis' Dunbarton tell Mis' Sawyer so on the 118 line — he was going to get his message, even if Laura delivered it in person.

It was only partly out of curiosity that she was going two miles out of her way in this dust. It was for the honor of the Company too. Nicholas Jockey's telegram lay on the seat beside her in its official yellow envelope on top of the pile of messages for Prince and his wife. It was certainly an exciting day, what with an elopement and all.

Laura, not having just hurtled up into a wood road like the side of a house, did not realize half how exciting.

She did not connect the dust settling on the hawkweed and even on the cinnamon fern with the honor of the Telephone Company. She only sneezed and thought that they needed rain.

Nicholas Jockey looked at the cascades of maidenhair falling in green spray over the banks of a leafy tunnel and said: 'We didn't come this way, did we? I don't seem to remember the ferns.'

'It's a short cut. Peter wouldn't know it,' Diana said truthfully.

'I like this green twilight,' he said.

He took his glasses off, and held them in his hand. He looked relaxed and easy. Chippy Hacky's jouncing and chattering over stones did not seem to disturb him. He did not try to talk above the noise, but sat there in a silence that seemed part of the hush of the woods.

The little car, having scabbled to the top of the gullied road, had made another sharp turn and was now running quietly, slowly, down a twisting grass-grown track. There were white birches along it. Through them the hills were a deep, clear blue, like a glimpse of the sea from a wooded shore. Suddenly they stood clear — Hunger's blue pinnacle, Hogback Man's sharpened, flattened length, the sharply notched shoulder of Catamountain. The sun was drawing water behind them. Billows of gilt-edged, inky clouds were piled above them. Far to the left Couching Lion sulked with his head on his paws and watched the airplane beacon flash red and white. Mansfield's high-chinned profile was only a faint blue shadow.

'Aren't we running north?' Nick Joceneyn asked.

'The road runs north for a while, but we're going east too. Boston's east of us, you know.'

He seemed satisfied with this fragment of truth.

'It's wild, isn't it?' he said, contentment in his voice. 'I thought I heard a hermit thrush.'

Diana stopped the car. They had reached the top of another hill. The water boiled and grumbled in the radiator. As it cooled and grew quiet, there came again the clear, unearthly loveliness of the hermit's call:

'Oh spheral, oh spheral,
Oh holy, oh holy...'

In the silence that followed he must, she thought, hear the beating of her heart. Either he did not hear it, or did not wish to. He began to talk about birds. Were the thrushes common here? What kinds had she seen?

She could talk about birds and would, she thought defiantly, give him what he wanted. She rolled off the names — the sparrows, the warblers, the woodpeckers, the marsh birds, the finches.

‘I saw a charm of goldfinches yesterday,’ she said.

‘A what?’

‘A charm — it’s the name for a flock of goldfinches, like a covey of partridges, or a bevy of quail.’

‘A charm,’ he repeated with his listening look; pleasure in it, amusement and interest in his voice; ‘that’s pretty. I like to think of that. A pattern of black and gold, across spiky thistle leaves and purple tufts. It must be funny to be a goldfinch and never sit down except on a thistle.’

She laughed at that, and the cold fingers — they had been clutching at her heart again — opened a little way.

‘Are there other names like that?’ he asked.

‘Lots of them, but I can’t remember them all. Except a murmuration of starlings. And a watch of nightingales.’

The thrush sent its liquid music once more through the green twilight.

‘The hermits are lovelier,’ he said. ‘A watch of thrushes — that would be something to hear.’

‘Yes, it is.’

‘You’ve heard it?’

‘This morning. Just after sunrise.’

‘Where were you?’

‘Oh, walking. On the hill above the house. I — couldn’t sleep.’

'Couldn't you?' he asked, and then, as if he were stepping back from a precipice, he added quickly, 'I — I suppose you are on the route of the spring migration here.'

The car had cooled now. So had the evening. So had that hand near her heart.

Diana pressed the starter.

'They say it's shifted this year, so that we're the center of it. There are birds around that people haven't seen for years. Kildeers, for instance. Fields of them. They have a melancholy call. I never heard it before. The wilderness is closing in on us in East Alcott. I met a lynx one evening. Ed Robbins saw a bear up on the mountain. A deer came and ate some of Peter's lettuce. Bertha chased it out, with the egg-beater.'

He gave his low, contented chuckle over that picture, but said gravely: 'I don't like your walking out in the woods in the dark.'

'No? Why?'

'I — you might — it's no business of mine, of course,' he concluded, stepping, somewhat lamely, back from the precipice again.

Diana drove on in the gathering twilight.

She could not tell afterward exactly which roads she took. There are a hundred miles of road in East Alcott. Most of them were there a century ago. Many of them have changed very little in the last fifty years, except for the worse. The grass grows taller in them, if anything, and the ruts are more deeply scored. Diana drove on most of them. She stopped several times to let the radiator cool. Once, sometime after sunset, she pulled up at a mossy tub with cold water running out of it. Nick filled the radiator with the ancient rusty dipper that hung there.

She walked around the car while he was doing it and inspected the tires. And of course the clothesline that tied the bumper on. It was holding nicely.

It was not very long after that — it was quite dark in the woods by that time — that the tire went flat.

Chapter 33

HILLTOP

THE SPARE WAS FLAT TOO, or almost.

‘We’ll have to go on the rim to the nearest place and buy two more tires,’ said Nick Joceneyn.

He had looked under the seat for the pump, but there was no pump there.

‘I’m afraid there’s something queer about the oil, too. I put in two quarts the evening before Peter went to Boston. Now there doesn’t seem to be much of any. That must be why it got so hot.’

She thrust the metal rod back into its place and shut the hood. She was having some difficulty in keeping the triumph out of her voice.

‘We can drive slowly,’ he said. ‘It will be all right till we get there.’

Chippy Hacky, however, had no idea of getting anywhere. He refused to start.

It was queer, Diana said. The starter had always been one of Chippy’s best points.

'I'll push it a way,' Nick said cheerfully. 'Soon get you on a down grade. Shove it in second when I get it rolling and then switch on the starter.'

Diana shoved the gear into second. She also succeeded in shoving the car into a ditch — a good deep ditch. There was mud in it, the only mud they had seen that day. Chippy Hacky settled into it, comfortably, like a man settling into an armchair after a good day's work.

Nick Joceleyn had no words of reproach. He did not even ask how she did it. He accepted without criticism the statement that she thought she saw a porcupine.

He said in his deep voice with the hidden laugh in it: 'I'm glad it's in so deep. Now I can't possibly be supposed to get it out. As a strong man I'm an awful washout. And I hate being shown up.'

He helped her out of the slanting front seat with a light and impersonal hand, asked as lightly: 'What do we do now? Tramp to the nearest town and get a wrecking car?'

Diana said: 'I'm — I'm afraid we're lost. The last turn I made didn't come out on the main road.'

This undoubted bit of accuracy did not seem to help much.

She added: 'We'd better climb the hill and see if we can see any lights. We'll see headlights on the main road if it's anywhere near. Or if there's a town, we can see it.'

They climbed up a boggy hillside. The hill was topped with maples and evergreens darker than the darkness around them.

'We ought to be able to see from here,' Diana said, stopping at a point where the boggy ground changed and became a series of ledges with grass nibbled short in between. 'There's no sense in going up into the woods.'

There were stars faintly shining through drifting cloud mountains; pale reflections of stars in the misty mirror of a pond across the road; greenish firefly flashes shimmering through the mist around the bog-holes — but no other light, it seemed, anywhere else in the world.

They had come to a place beyond time and space. Mist was rising to shut them into it. Even as they stood there, the pond was blotted out and the firefly lights were dimmed. Somewhere to the left of them a brook hurried down in the darkness. Young frogs kept up a shrill peeping and almost drowned the faint sighing of the hemlocks and the silky rustle of new maple leaves above them.

‘Yes, we’re lost,’ Nick Joceleyn said.

He sounded neither annoyed nor pleased. The statement was as impersonal as the touch with which he had helped her out of the car and from one tussock of bog grass to the next.

‘I’m sorry,’ he added. ‘I’m afraid we’ll have to stay until it gets light. There’s no use in playing around in this fog. I only wish it weren’t so chilly for you.’

She wasn’t cold, Diana said. And it was all her fault for trying to take the short cut. She thought they could get back to the car, and then they could follow the road which, after all, must lead somewhere. Unless, of course, it was an old road up to a logging camp, no longer used. The last thing she’d noticed before the headlights went off was that the grass was getting pretty long in the middle. Still they could try either that or walking back in the direction from which they had come. Only it was miles since they had seen a house.

No. They’d better stay here, Nick said quietly. And he would make a fire. Because he had been a boy scout. Burwell had insisted on it.

He pulled dry branches off the hemlocks, piled them in a cleft between the ledges, found the dead limbs of a wild-apple tree and snapped them underfoot. He soon had a fire going, a thing of towering orange flames that gave way after its first burst of crackle and smoke to the clear glowing rose of apple wood.

'I'll go down and get the rugs from the car,' he said, 'and your coat. I can find my way back by the fire. Or if I can't see it through the fog, I'll call. You don't mind staying alone and keeping up the fire, do you?'

'Not — not much,' she said.

It was an artistic triumph, she felt, of courage conquering timidity. It seemed wasted on the audience, however!

'I'll be right back,' he said briskly. 'Keep the fire up.'

Later, Nick, floundering through fog and mud a quarter of a mile below, called to her, but because of the crackling fire she did not hear him the first time. When at last she heard his voice, it came from a point far to her left, over near the brook.

It was a strange melancholy call, a little like the cry of a loon, a little like a distant foghorn.

'No one else calls like that,' she thought. Then she answered with the yodel that she had learned in Switzerland. It would pierce the fog, turn him toward her.

'He mustn't,' she thought, with a little cold shudder, 'go so near the brook.'

As she sent her voice ringing again into the hollow darkness, she seemed to reach through it and touch him on the shoulder. His answering cry, faint and far off, was like a contraction in her own throat. It was wistful, urgent, unearthly.

She called again, louder; she threw more hemlock on the fire. It blazed up fiercely and in its snapping roar she could not tell whether his voice had moved toward her. It still sounded faint and far away.

‘He *must* see it. *Must* hear me,’ she thought, fanning the fog out of her stinging eyes. ‘Oh, let him hear me, *please*.’

Her yodel had a despairing note now, but it was answered from close at hand. In a moment he was inside the circle of firelight, looking taller than ever as he strode into it through the curtain of mist and smoke.

‘Siegfried,’ she thought; half expected to hear the fire music.

He shrank in the orange glow to a tired man with a bundle in his arms. His breath was coming hard and he did not speak, but managed a smile that relaxed the line between his dark brows and loosed his tense lips.

‘I’m soft still. Sorry to be so long,’ he said after a while. ‘Stupid of me — floundering around like that.’

‘It’s easy to get off the path in this — in any bog,’ Diana said. ‘And the smoke must have made the fog even thicker between you and the fire. You were close to the brook, weren’t you?’

‘Too close. There must be a fall there somewhere. I was right on the edge of a gorge for a minute. Just after I called the second time. Then I heard you.’

‘Yes, I know.’

She said nothing more. She could not bear to think or talk about it.

He got up and went back toward the evergreens.

‘There ought to be a balsam somewhere around. Ah — here’s one. Just about the right size.’

There was a sound of chopping.

'What are you doing?' Diana asked as the young tree crackled and swished to the ground.

'Making you a bed. You don't carry a pump, but you had a hatchet in your tool box. I consider it a good choice. I'd a lot rather chop than pump tires.'

'I don't need a bed. Please don't bother. I'm not sleepy. Even if I were I could sleep on the ground with one of those rugs.'

'It won't take a minute. And you'll like it. The ground has a way of humping up and hitting you in the night.'

'The nights are short now.'

(So short. So short. And we have only this one.)

If he heard the undertone, he did not pay attention to it. He went on slashing branches from the fallen tree; cut young hemlocks, slashed more branches; laid the frame in a place sheltered from smoke and wind; thatched the springy, scented branches into a mattress.

'You'll never want to sleep on anything else after you try this,' he said, laying a rug neatly over it.

'I'm not going to sleep on this,' Diana asserted.

'I would hate to knock you down. I probably could, because I have the hatchet.'

'Oh — cave-man stuff.'

'It comes out in the most effete of us,' he admitted gravely. 'Let me, please, have the satisfaction of thinking I am some use in the wilderness. I leave cars in ditches. I can't blow up tires with a single puff as a strong man should. I get lost in bogs and have to be yodeled out of them. But I can make a couch fit for a wandering Princess. Please try it.'

She tried it and lay there quietly, looking up at the dim stars behind the hurrying cloud wrack.

He covered her with her coat and turned away.

‘What are you going to do?’

He answered her gently as one does a child temporizing for one more minute of life and light: ‘Smoke a pipe. Fix the fire. Make myself a bed. I’ve plenty of stuff cut. Go to sleep. And report any crumpled rose leaves to the management. Good night.’

At least she could watch him; could see against the firelight that sharply cut nose and chin and the pipe adding its small puff of smoke to the other smoke that was blowing above the mist. She could see, too, the obstinate tuft of hair that pushed up from the crown of his head like a small boy’s cowlick — an endearingly stubborn tuft of hair, and the strong hands cupped around the tiny flame of the match. He smoked about as much bulk of matches as of tobacco. The small spurt of flame would light up his face for a moment, thrusting the shadows upward, giving it a curious ruggedness.

‘The shadow of a rock — in a thirsty land.’

The words drifted through her mind. She was thirsty — a little: the thirst that is something like sleep.

Yes, he was like a rock. She had been a fool to try to move him. It wasn’t, she knew now, his blindness that had separated them, or the money. It was simply that for him she didn’t exist. His new look today, the brilliant smile with the tenderness and sweetness in it, was only the look that he turned also on Polly, on Peter, on Sam and Bertha, on the three tiger kittens. Even on Ed Robbins bringing that telegram. It was Eleanor Joceleyn’s listening look, human in its sympathy, but impersonal too — as impersonal as the stars, or as the drifting clouds that make the stars, too, seem to drift.

The whole world seemed to be blowing away around her. The clouds with the stars slipping in and out seemed part of the voice of the brook with its rush and roar, part of the wind in the hemlocks, part of sleep . . .

It was dark when she woke. The fire had died down to a few pink coals. There was no watching figure beside it. Fear that he might have wandered off again toward the falls clutched at her. She got up and, with eyes sharpened by fear, looked into the darkness around her. The stars had gone. The night was blacker than ever.

She found him. There had been only a thin wall of spruces between them. At first his face was only a light blur against his dark pillow. Then, as her eyes grew used to the faint light, she could see its curves and hollows. She knew them all. They had been in her mind since the day in their uncle's office, when she had picked up the picture of the man with his arm in the sling.

He had looked gay and reckless in the picture; fevered and tragic that night with the blood and the ink and broken glass around him; indifferent and courteous behind his black lenses all the other times — until today. Today — no yesterday it must be now — he was tender and friendly. Yet it was the same face that she was seeing now in the pink glow of the dying fire.

For the first time and for the last she could really look at him, trace in his sleeping face the likeness to Stephen Jocelyn. The strong line of the black brows that almost met over his arched nose, the jutting chin with the cleft in it, the deep creases in the cheeks were all Stephen's. Only Stephen's eyes had been brown and had looked at the world with a gentle melancholy and vagueness.

Those eyes under those black-fringed lids were — not Stephen's. The curve of his lips was gentle, but it was firm, too. Her father's had had in those last years, unless he knew someone was watching him, a defeated look; but when, according to local etiquette, he lay in the front room against the pillow of fluted white satin — how he would have hated it! — among the bunches of nasturtiums and bachelor's buttons and clove pinks while the neighbors filed past him, there was a magnificence about Stephen Joceneyn in spite of the undertaker from Piedmont Center.

About Nick Joceneyn, too, with one pitch-stained hand thrown back of his head and the other crossed over his breast, with his black hair falling over his forehead, there was something splendid. Diana felt for a moment the compassion that a waking person feels for a sleeping one; the unwillingness to take advantage of someone defenseless; to pry and peer through a keyhole. Yet even though sleep had touched his face with youth and innocence, Nicholas Joceneyn did not look defenseless. He had rather the air of a young knight watching his armor, intent under his drooped eyelids on his task.

How long she watched him before the darkness began to lift, she did not know. She realized only that the fire had faded into pearl-gray ashes, that its last pale smoke was fading against a sky suddenly faintly luminous.

Then the birds began.

She had never heard it before, the dawn chorus at the height of the mating season. Most people never hear it. It began with the first call of the robins, gathered momentum with the voices of thrushes deep in the woods above her, the veery's ringing song, the broken fluting of the wood thrush,

the hermit's solemn harping. In and out among the other voices began to wind the caroling of grosbeaks. From somewhere below came the soft *Whereaway, Whereaway* of the bluebirds, the plaintive call of the whitethroat, the song sparrow's trill of rapture.

In the marsh below the redwing's *Kong-quer-ree* sounded in the mist. The plovers piped their ringing *Kildeer, Kildee*. There were elms rising out of the fog and in the elms were orioles playing their clarinets. And bobolinks! How many bobolinks must there be to make that tinkling guitar chorus: *Pinkolink. Bobolink. Plink, Plank, Plink*.

Surely it would wake him, she thought, this world that had become suddenly only vibrating air, only song, only, now, a symphony so complex that individual voices were lost in it. It was growing louder and louder as the feather fan of cloud in the east turned rose and amber.

Yet Nicholas Jocene still slept. She could have reached out, easily, so easily, and touched that strong, thin hand on his breast, but she did not. Shut in his tent of sleep he was close to her. When he left it, he would be far away. As far, in his careless friendliness, as he had been in the days of his blindness. Farther, perhaps.

Whether it was the birds that woke him at last, or the growing light, or the weight of her gaze on his face, she did not know. Only, suddenly, his eyes met hers, met them with a piercing quality that kept her speechless, held by his look.

There was a second — it hardly could have been more — before she looked away: a second in which all the melancholy and sweetness and longing of the singing birds was in her eyes as well as all around them. For that moment they seemed to be floating together on that cloud of song. Then,

with an effort that stabbed her side, forced from her one tearless gasp of pain, she turned away her head, got unsteadily to her feet, stumbled toward her hemlock bed — toward any shelter where she might hide what her eyes had shown.

Only she did not stumble far.

Long before she reached her shelter, that voice said close behind her: 'Oh, my darling, what is it?'

Then as she turned, his arms were around her.

'You know, I think,' she murmured, close to his heart.

Then for a long time no one — except the birds — said anything at all.

The mist still filled the valley, but islands were rising out of it: small ones that were clumps of trees. Larger ones that were other hills. It rolled off slowly, showing the brook vanishing into a gorge marked by steeple-pointed spruces; steamed off the pond with the blue flags around it; let hay-fields begin to stir in green and silver waves under the sun and the morning breeze. Last of all, just visible around the shoulder of the hill, appeared a small collection of white and red buildings, an octagonal barn among them.

Nick Jockey said at last, in a puzzled tone: 'Why, that looks like East Alcott — that barn ——'

'I suppose,' Diana murmured, 'that's because it is East Alcott. Oh, Nick, will you ever forgive me?'

'For what?' he asked, holding her, if anything, a little closer.

'For driving you a hundred miles in circles and dumping you on a hill within two miles of a comfortable house and food and things. And — and telling lies, and letting the air out of the tire, and disconnecting the battery.'

‘Was that all?’

His voice didn’t sound angry.

‘Yes. I think so. I didn’t do anything to the spare: that got flat by itself somehow; that was why I did the battery.’

‘You needn’t have bothered,’ he said. ‘I let the air out of the spare myself.’

‘You mean,’ she said — ‘you mean that you — liked me anyway. It wasn’t an accident?’

‘I mean, my darling, that I loved you from the first time I touched your hand on the stairs, the night I heard you crying across the hall. The night I knew you were my funny little cousin with the pigtailed grown-up. I listened a long time. At last I went to knock at your door. I was in pain and could not sleep. I thought we might as well bear it together, that night, that one night. I’d be going to the hospital in the morning anyway. It didn’t seem to matter then that I was poor and blind and that you were rich. But you had dropped off to sleep. I covered you up and went back to my room. Then I upset the lamp, and you came, but Burwell came too.

‘I was so hopeless in the hospital. I used to listen for your step and be rude when you came. And you got engaged to Peter. I tried to hate you, but I didn’t make much of a job of it. I couldn’t see your loveliness, but I could always feel it, breathe it. Not just the mayflower smell that’s in your hair, but your goodness and sweetness.’

‘But I’m not good. I — I kidnap people and scheme and plot. Only I never will again. Never. Because there mustn’t be anything between us. I’m ashamed, but I had to know — one way or the other. I couldn’t bear it any longer, not knowing.’

‘Do you know now? Are you quite sure?’

'Yes, I know.'

'What is it you know?'

'That we belong to each other.'

'For always?'

'For always.'

A pair of cedar waxwings hopped around in a red elderberry bush and listened to this performance. They raised their crests and hissed to each other gently. Apparently they decided human beings were ridiculous, as, from a waxwing angle, they undoubtedly are.

'Shall we go back to East Alcott and get Judge Wilbur to marry us?'

'When?'

'This morning.'

'Oh,' Diana said, 'not this *morning!*'

'This afternoon, then.'

'Even in East Alcott, which believes in marriage and makes it easy, there are some formalities to be observed. They have that liking for birth certificates. Just a fad, of course.'

'I have them,' Nicholas Joceneyn announced with a chuckle. 'Sing does nothing by halves. He got ours at the same time as the others. "As long as we were all born in the Square," he said, "we might as well get some good out of it." And,' continued Nick, 'you might as well know that if you had tried to drive out of the State of Vermont you would have had a fight on your hands. Weak as I am. Because two can play at kidnaping.'

There was an interlude during which the waxwings flew away, looking, if possible, more critical than ever.

Diana said at last, 'Your eyes — I never knew they were blue,' and then, 'I liked him so much.'

'He liked you. He left a letter for us to read together some day.'

They were silent for a while, looking at the last silver roll of mist moving out of the valley.

'If we are going to be married,' he said at last, 'we must leave our magic mountain, I suppose.'

'Must we leave it? It won't ever be the same again.'

'Not the same. Better.'

'I'm not so sure,' Diana said gravely. 'I — I've — there's something I've got to tell you, Nick. After you've heard it — you may not want me. If we're going back — you'll hear it anyway. You see I didn't let the air out of the tires and wreck the battery just for nothing. I had to do it, Nick, because — there's something —'

'Nothing's coming between us,' he said, holding her closely, gently.

'Let me go, please,' she said. 'Don't make it hard for me.'

He let her go, but kept his eyes, brilliantly blue under the heavy black brows, fixed on her with a look that was in itself an embrace.

'Nothing's coming between us,' he repeated, 'my dearest, not now.'

'Not this, Nick?'

She handed him the gray-and-red slip with Ed Robbins's large neat writing on it.

Eben was lying. You'll get your million. Plenty of money to pay all bequests even without stock-market rise. He's been thrown out of Tea Company. Good hunting.

BILL

'There was another one pretty nearly like it for you, Nick. That's why I dragged you away,' Diana said in a choked

voice. 'It seemed as if I had to be with you sometime when there was just you and me — our real selves, without something pulling us apart. So — well, you know now. And we might as well go. They'll have the message for you at Wilbur's now. It wasn't quite the same. It said you'd better hurry back. Job for you there. I think it meant in the Tea Company.'

'I'd like that,' he said. 'We can live in Paul Revere Square. And come up here for week-ends. This hill looks pretty good for skiing. Do you think you could teach me? I never learned.'

'Nick,' she said — she couldn't have been running — but she sounded so. 'Nick — you mean you don't care about the money? You mean you're not going to be disgusting and noble and say you won't marry me if I have it and won't let me refuse it because you cannot accept my sacrifice? You're really going to be nice!'

'Didn't you hear me the first time? I said nothing was coming between us. Good Heavens, darling, we can give it away. Help Peter with his store. Set Bill and Clare up in that horseback camp thing he's always wanted to do. We can even,' he said, 'do something for Master Eben, if I can think anything good enough. Because if he hadn't tried to be the Machiavelli of Paul Revere Square, I'd be in New York this morning starting that job. Yes, I think we owe Eben something.'

'He wants a ski cabin,' Diana said, the dimple stirring in her cheek. 'Oh, Nick, you are *the* most wonderful man in the world!'

'That being clearly understood and admitted,' he said, 'we'll buy him one. In New Hampshire.'

Chapter 34

BURWELL IS SATISFIED

AFTER ALL, THEY WERE MARRIED standing, not on the flowered linoleum in Bertha Wilbur's front room, but in the old house in Paul Revere Square.

'Let's not leave out your mother,' Diana had said, 'or Clare. Or Burwell. We'll take Sam and Bertha with us. Will you mind awfully being married with our friends looking on?'

'I will hire the Public Garden and invite the D.A.R., the Boy Scouts, and the Elks if it will please you,' he promised.

So Chippy Hacky, equipped with two new tires and with his battery and starter reunited, took the road again. They fed him a gallon and a half of oil (at wholesale, of course, put in by Prince Lobanov). Using up the oil had been Chippy Hacky's own contribution to the courtship. No one had let it out.

Bertha and Sam filled the back seat.

'I never thought I'd see Boston,' Sam said.

'Perhaps you won't,' Nick said. 'I'm not at all sure that she knows the road.'

Diana patted Chippy Hacky affectionately on the radiator as he chugged to a stop in Paul Revere Square.

'Isn't he a wonderful little car, Nick? You won't make me sell him down the river, will you?'

'Chippy Hacky,' Nick said magnificently, 'shall be stuffed and put under glass.'

'He wouldn't like that.'

'Then he shall always have a warm corner in the garage under an embroidered dust sheet. We Joceneys look after our cars even when they are past their work.'

'Chippy isn't past his work.'

'Then — is this what you want me to say, you Serpent of old Winooski or Onion River? — he shall have a quart of oil every day and he shall take us, when we go away, and when he breaks down ——'

'Chippy,' Diana said staunchly, 'doesn't break down — without help.'

'As I was about to say when interrupted — if he breaks down, I shall know it is purely psychological.'

'I'll take some nails along,' Diana promised.

No countenance in Paul Revere Square shone brighter than Burwell's. This wedding he considered his own particular work of art. Indeed it was; for the principal figures had a careless way of saying, 'Just whatever you think best, Burwell,' about flowers and food and music and important matters like where the bridegroom should stand.

(Just wherever you say, Burwell. On my head on the hatrack if you think best... Diana, Diana, where are

you? . . . Here, Nick, in the study. Dusting my peachblow vase . . .)

'They don't take it serious,' Burwell complained to Sam Wilbur.

Sam, having recovered from his embarrassment at being waited on at dinner by a gentleman in a dress suit, now spent a good deal of time in Burwell's pantry discussing Boston's historic monuments. They would begin at some point such as the Old State House, but generally returned before long to the Jocene family.

Sam was of the opinion that matrimony need not be taken too seriously. A man, he said, might just as well give in, and be cheerful about it. Men did not have much chance in New England anyway. Being outnumbered.

These sentiments were deliberately produced to the rhythm of Burwell's silver polishing with solemn pauses between.

Burwell confided his formula for avoiding marriage. It was simple, he said. You just ran away when you felt yourself reaching for your pocketbook when she saw something she liked in a shop window. Or if you felt like buying a new necktie, then was the time to run.

That would not have helped him much, Sam said. He'd got married before he'd had either a pocketbook or a necktie. And he had a good wife, as wives go. Sometimes he had come mighty near telling her so.

In the general excitement even Hannah relaxed a little of her dark feeling on the subject of matrimony and to consider the merits of lobster salad and truffled chicken in aspic.

'We'll have no caterer's food here,' she said, waving a large spoon. Hannah pronounced it 'catterers' which somehow

made it an epithet definitely scornful. 'The cake shall be a light fruitcake which can be eaten in five days without being like lead in the stomach. You, Bridget Concannon, will start slicing citron this afternoon in the time you are generally taking that beauty sleep of yours. And you will slice it the thinness of a shamrock leaf. And I will not have Michael Connor hanging around my kitchen in them Russian clothes of his, snapping up cake crumbs like a wolf. Irishmen to be Russians, it's heresy, no less. I'll have no heretics here.'

Taking no cognizance of an experimental sniffle from Miss Concannon, she went on: 'Minna and Sarah, I'll have to have help getting the yellow peel off these lemons. We'll make the punch this morning the way it would be mellowed by The Day. There's Medford Rum for it that Mr. Jocene hid in the linen closet in Nineteen Eighteen. Also Yellow Chartreuse and Peach Brandy.'

'Is there, indeed?' Burwell asked. 'And why wasn't I told about it?'

'If you'd found it yourself, you'd have known, so why didn't you as well as another?'

'I'm a butler, I am, not a bloodhound,' Burwell said grimly.

But Hannah passed this remark over lightly, and went on: 'And if you'd known, you'd likely have set it out for Bill Shatswell to lap up. Where would we have been then for Mr. Nick's wedding? It's been fine and safe all these years at the bottom of my own trunk.'

She did not listen to Burwell's remarks about her wine-cellar, but spoke on the topic of the bride's cake, which would not, she said, taste of either sawdust or hair tonic. Since she would beat it up with her own two hands. And if

anyone tramped into her kitchen and it in the oven, it would be the worse for him. Having uttered this threat, she reverted to the subject of lobsters. She would go herself to the market and snap the tails of them, and them that did not show fight enough would never see Paul Revere Square.

‘And good enough for them,’ said Hannah, with a scornful twist of her thumb, a Vestal Virgin’s signal that consigned all meek-spirited lobsters to service outside Paul Revere Square. ‘If there’s a salmon fresh out of the Penobscot I’ll have it whole on our big silver platter, so, if you’ll get it out, Mr. Burwell, and be giving it a good shine ——’

‘I have already done so,’ Burwell informed her coldly.

‘All that’s on my mind now, then, is that Help-a-Bit place,’ Hannah said gloomily. ‘To think we’d have to take shame before Her Royal Highness Mrs. Sophia Lobanov with a shop in our front hall!’

‘If you’d take a look in the front hall you’d see them blue boxes being carried upstairs to the fourth floor, where Mrs. Joceneyn is to have a private apartment constructed while the Young Couple is away.’

‘Praise be. But Miss Desmond, will she be in it still?’

‘Don’t be surprised when I tell you that Miss Desmond is to become Mrs. William Shatswell before long. Mr. Nick and Miss Diana is setting them up in a camp to teach riding.’

Hannah agreed not to be surprised.

‘Thank the saints, I do not have to be in any such camp,’ was her comment. ‘And is that all the marriages they’re planning on? Singleton, is he still a bachelor?’

Burwell reassured her. Singleton, he said, was still in the market, if she was looking for someone. But Eben Keith was engaged. To a young lady from the West. That he met skiing. Her father was something in oil. ‘

Burwell made the gentleman referred to sound like an anchovy. But it wasn't that kind of oil. More in the line of fuel for oil-burners. And Mr. Nick and Miss Diana were giving Eben a skiing cabin for a wedding present. In New Hampshire.

'And a very nice return for the silver-plated nut dish that Eben gave us,' Hannah remarked. The wedding presents were not individual tributes, but a communal affair. Each one was carefully scrutinized and awarded its place in the scheme of things by the Committee, Miss Hannah Concanon, Chairman. 'Is Mr. Nick and Miss Diana gone crazy entirely?'

Burwell inclined to think they had. They'd given away about half the money already, it appeared. Buying Bill the camp. Giving a fund for people with the same eye-trouble Mr. Nick had. Setting a big lump of money aside to fix the house for a museum, so that people would be coming in to look at china, and hiring experts — as if Miss Diana weren't a good enough expert, Burwell said loyally. He heard they'd done something for Peter too. And, of course, there was the apartment for Mrs. Joceneyn with an elevator to it, no less.

He did not disapprove of any of these things. BUT giving Eben that cabin was, in Burwell's opinion, the limit. As if Eben hadn't done everything he could to get Miss Diana for himself. Which was all right by fair means, but when it came to circulating rumors about THE ESTATE and putting it about that his uncle left a lot of money that he did not have — well, he supposed the cabin was coals of fire, and, 'I hope it sings him. Plenty!' Burwell concluded.

Eben showed no signs of being singed. He brought Miss Pfeiffer, whose father was in oil, to the wedding. She was a

quiet girl with a habit of putting her hand over her mouth when she laughed. She had small, timid eyes, which she kept admiringly on Eben most of the time, a diamond and sapphire bracelet, and a hearty appetite. The consensus of the staff was that skiing would do her good.

No one really looked at her very much, though.

Because of Diana.

She wore the white dress that her uncle had chosen for her, the dress made out of clouds of dewdrops, the one in which Nick had first seen her. He had asked her to wear it. They had raised their eyebrows at the shop where she had bought it at the idea of changing it over into a wedding dress, but they had done it — for a certain amount — and had sent a very patronizing lady to dress Diana in it and to fasten the orange blossoms in her veil and around the drift of white mist that was her train.

Only Diana was already dressed when the patronizing lady arrived. It was Eleanor Joceleyn who had fastened the orange blossoms in her hair and Clare Desmond who had fixed them in the misty train and nearly cried into it.

The patronizing lady didn't even patronize. She disapproved of the whole thing.

The idea of the groom's coming into the bride's room and getting her to tie his ascot! Why, he ought not to have been in the house, much less in her room! What romance was there unless the bride was a total surprise? (Pronounced tuttle sap-rice.)

Yet somehow to Nicholas Joceleyn standing at the foot of the stairs with Bill beside him, Diana's coming was no anticlimax. In the dark hall she seemed to shine with a light that came, not from the tall candles that Burwell had placed so carefully, but from herself.

Her hair shone through the veil like frosted gold. Her face was grave and tender. There was a luminous clearness about it that centered in the clear brown depths of her eyes. She seemed to move toward him like a cloud with sunlight and moonlight on it too.

Whether his feet were on the floor or not, he couldn't really be sure. Everything became a blur except Diana's face. The flowers and the candle smoke and the faint throbbing of violins and 'cellos, the eyes of Paul Revere Square, all melted together and vanished.

There was only Diana.

Sam Wilbur thought that 'The Reverend' — as he called the old man in the curious costume with white puffed sleeves and the cross shining against the heavy black silk — did a fine job. Watching 'The Reverend's' face that was so like some old picture and listening to the voice that still had a wonderful depth and clearness, Sam felt some twinges of envy. If he had only been a Reverend himself, he might have done as well, he thought, but he felt some doubts. Bertha, however, did not share them. Sam, she thought loyally, when he was marrying anyone, looked just as well as any Reverend, even if Sam's collar did fasten in front.

The breathless young man with the sunburned face and peeling nose — he had appeared at the door during the ceremony — was perfectly satisfied with Sam's ministrations. As an old married man of nearly two weeks, Prince Peter Lobanov of East Alcott was naturally an expert. So was his small brown Princess. She surveyed the backs of Paul Revere Square decked out for the wedding with the bright eyes of a valiant sparrow confronted by a muster of peacocks and ready to peck their eyes out — if necessary. Sam Wilbur,

she decided, would have made a fine bishop. She only hoped that Sam would not think it was wrong to come away and leave the store in Ed Robbins's charge for the day, but they couldn't really let Nick and Diana get married without them — not after what they had done, buying the store from Sam and giving it to her and Peter, so that they could get a real start. She did hope Ed had remembered to put more ice in the soft-drink case. It was going to be a hot day. Well, Laura would remind him. She had a day off and she was spending it in the store . . .

Burwell wished that his master could have been there. He knew it was happening just the way Nicholas Joceneyn had wanted. Ever since the day she fried the eggs. Only, Burwell thought, the way things had turned out they'd needed quite a bit of help. Sending her to the hospital with those sweet peas — that wasn't a bad idea. And never letting on that Eben was telling lies about The Estate. It was true that the stock market went down, but Burwell happened to know that his master had sold out months ago when stocks were up. And he knew, too, that Mr. Nick would never ask a girl with a million dollars to marry him when he was broke and out of a job. Nicholas Joceneyn, the elder, hadn't known anything about Mr. Nick's blindness and that he was broke, of course. If he had, he would have made the will different. As it was, Burwell had had to fix things up the best he could . . .

Princess Sophia Lobanov did not see her son and daughter-in-law come in, so she was able to enjoy her own appearance. She had a well-developed talent for making all the other women in the room feel that they had worn the wrong thing. She was in filmy black today with the cool green of emeralds

caught in white diamond fire lighting it here and there. Her long green eyes surveyed the other women's flowered prints and neat arrangements of dark blue with white dots with a pitying gaze. There was even — oh, horror! — a woman in blue lace over a pink slip. It was that sister of Mrs. Clifton's whose name the Princess had so carefully forgotten. Why were people allowed to leave blue lace dresses around in shops? There ought to be a law. And what did one have a policeman at the door for if not to keep out things like that?

She paid a grudging tribute to Eleanor Jocene's silvery gray figure. That woman — in spite of being a designing intriguer — knew how to dress. On the whole, since Eleanor Jocene had been so clever at worming her way into the Square, perhaps, the Princess thought, she had better take her up. After all, they were sisters-in-law. And the ridiculous shop, she noticed, no longer polluted the reception room. Nick, in throwing Diana's money around like a drunken Cossack, had evidently not forgotten his mother.

Mrs. Shatswell felt proud of her family. Bertram had given the bride away with his usual dignity. He stood up so straight that his head was on a level with Diana's and, after he had joined her hand with Nick's, he managed to get out of the way without stepping on her train. Bill was efficient with the ring. He and Clare both looked so happy that Mrs. Shatswell, seeing their faces, seeing Priscilla and Dan so cleanly scrubbed and so excited, hearing Nick say 'Till Death us do part,' gave a combination of sob and sniff that almost drowned the Bishop's voice.

She couldn't help it. Weddings always made her cry. She wished Singleton would not look so gloomy. He was a hard boy to understand. Even this morning he had talked as if he

had planned the wedding himself, but now he was scowling at Diana and looking the way he did that time he ate the green apples.

Mrs. Keith glanced impatiently at her sister Bessie whose nose was getting red. Sentimental people always had red noses at weddings. Mrs. Keith's Joceleyn beak kept its usual parchment tint. It was a reward. For not being sentimental. Even Follingsby Clifton was blowing his nose in a clandestine sort of way — a lawyer; it was disgusting. And Doctor Lomond openly mopped his eyes and cleared his throat. Why, if that sort of thing kept up, the place would sound like the china-closet sink when it was stopped up. She must speak to Maggie about scraping the plates more carefully . . .

Eben at least, she noted with satisfaction, kept his composure. He did not even look triumphant, which was noble of Eben, seeing how much better he had done by waiting. Not that Mary Pfeiffer was a beauty. She was an unspoiled girl. Sensible. Not the cuddly type, of course. And with such practical, non-committal coloring. Mrs. Keith had never Trusted Blondes . . .

'Inasmuch as Nicholas and Diana have consented together . . .'

Burwell motioned the servants back from the doorway and walked quietly toward the dining-room. Before long it would be demolished — his perfect arrangement of crystal and silver and succulence. For the moment everything was in order: the amber pool in the yellow punchbowl with the green dragons fighting on it, the white towers of cake, the salmon lordly in pink and silver among the jade-colored heaps of peas, the coral of lobster claws against the tender

green of lettuce, the piles of Lowestoft plates with the ermine-draped escutcheons and the gold-starred borders. Just for a second he could not see clearly. Mr. Nick's and Miss Diana's wedding breakfast quivered for a little while behind a mist.

He thought hastily of the butler in Park Avenue Penthouse, and pulled himself together. He was the perfect butler, dignified, benevolent, courtly, by the time the guests came in.

Those who saw the meeting between the Dowager Princess Lobanov and her son all admitted that the Princess Sophia put on a good show. Her smile was charming, if a little vague, as she met him.

'Why, Peter — you and Polly are like a breath from the country!' she exclaimed, presenting her cheek for kissing to each in turn. She withdrew it in both cases so that the kisses fell on empty air, a gesture that always makes the person who does the kissing look silly, but naturally that was only accidental.

'It suits you, Peter — this rustic air, but definitely,' she added with great sweetness, 'and my little daughter, too. She looks — doesn't she? — like a dear little brown thrush. One expects her — doesn't one? — to burst into song, she looks so happy!'

'No. It's the male birds who sing,' growled Singleton, who had been looking on sulkily at the kissing game.

The Princess accepted this ornithological correction graciously.

'Why, so it is,' she said, with her merriest, silveriest laugh, 'and they wear the fine feathers, too. I remember. So Peter, with that splendid yellow-and-white tie, he'd be — wouldn't he? — our little thrush's goldfinch.'

'Goldfinches,' Sing told her, 'don't mate with thrushes.'

'Really?' inquired the Princess languidly. 'I didn't know.'

If Peter and Polly felt this claw-scratch, they did not show it. They looked, Princess Lobanov thought, almost bovine in their happiness. Well, she gave Peter up. Definitely.

She passed through the crowded rooms like some Marquise La Rochefoucauld might have known, a little remote, a little cold, a little proud, but with the rapier of her wit ready to flash out. With this picture of herself clearly in her mind, she gradually effaced the distasteful ones: Peter sunk in rustic obscurity . . . Nicholas and Diana rich and successful . . .

She would go, she decided, as soon as Clifton paid the last installment to her legacy. It ought to be soon now. She might marry. Some young Parisian, sophisticated, suave, subtle. Someone like Proust, only without asthma and not so neurotic. After all, if Gertrude Stein with her figure could have a salon —! And when she found the right person, she wouldn't be stingy about settlements, because, while she was always scrimping and saving in Paul Revere Square, keeping up this enormous house, and all for Peter's benefit, in Paris she could be rich. She owed Peter nothing. Absolutely. Let him wallow in his ridiculous shop . . .

Michael Connor tapped gently three times at a certain window on the alleyway. It opened and a loaded plate was thrust out.

'You needn't be gobbling too fast,' said a voice from inside, 'for they're all upstairs but me. And will be until it's gone away she is with Mr. Nick. Aunt Hannah thinks I am in the ladies' dressing-room. On the third floor where I would not see any of the men. How do you like the chicken mouse? I made it myself.'

'I never thought to eat mice, but it's fine.'

'Oh, you're a funny fellah!'

'There's not many like me,' said Mr. Connor modestly, through a filter of mousse, salad, and Parker House roll.

'The rolls I made, too,' continued the voice from the window.

'I've tasted worse.'

'And I beat up the mayonnaise, the way my elbows still ache from it.'

'Stick your elbow out the window then, and I'll make it better.'

'My head's aching too.'

'Stick your head out, then.'

Miss Concannon put her head out. She looked in reasonably good health. Her eyes seemed to have grown if anything.

'Does it feel better now?' Mr. Connor inquired after a suitable interval.

'A little.'

'Listen, then, Bridget. I got that job. In the filling station. With a chance at a station of my own. I've money saved. So we'll get the Priest to read out our names, will we?'

'We will.'

'Is your head better now?'

'It came on worse, all of a sudden ...'

Chapter 35

PEACHBLOW: DAWN

SHE WAS WRAPPING SOMETHING in tissue paper and stuffing it in among her neatly folded clothes when he came to the door of her room. She turned and said: 'Do you mind my taking it? I know it's silly.'

'Taking what?' he asked gently, not touching her except with his brilliant blue gaze.

'The peachblow vase.'

'Take the whole Ming dynasty if you like — but why?'

'I — I'll tell you sometime. Not now.'

'I'll wait,' he said gravely, 'as long as you like.'

Bill came for the bags.

'I've left your puddle-jumper about three blocks off. Mother's chauffeur will drive you to it. Wish we had a tally-ho. There's no style these days,' he lamented, and added the information that the left front tire didn't look any too enthusiastic.

'Good,' Nick said. 'Perhaps it will blow out.'

Bill opened his mouth slightly, kept it so for a while, but finally said cheerfully: 'Well, it's your necks, not mine.'

They ran down the stairs. The noise and the whirl of rose petals rushed up to meet them. The bouquet of white orchids fell into Clare's outstretched hands. Bill's shout, 'Yoicks, gone away!' followed them through the hall.

Burwell had the door open.

'I wish you every happiness, Mrs. Joceneyn,' he said in his best manner.

It never would have happened on Park Avenue; it was shocking for it to happen in Paul Revere Square, yet being kissed on the cheek by the bride had something strangely pleasant about it. He stood rubbing the place and watching her feet running down the red carpet. People ran past him, leaving him standing there.

Rose petals swirled into the air and were blown into the geraniums around the Statue.

The Shatswells' high-shouldered limousine chugged out of the Square.

Peter Lobanov, squeezed in the corner, emerged from under the robe and said: 'I hope you don't mind a stowaway. It's only as far as where Chippy Hacky is. Polly's there. I want to show you something.'

'Do you think we can trust him, Nick?' Diana asked.

'I,' said Peter virtuously, 'never kidnaped anyone in my life.'

'Blackmail, I suppose, then,' Diana suggested.

'No. I just want you to see your wedding present.'

'I hope it's another nut dish. That would make six. Complete the set.'

'Sorry. It's not.'

Chippy Hacky stood patiently outside the Quincy Galleries. He had been washed and there was a new clothesline to keep the bumper in place.

'Polly's inside,' Peter said, but Diana was looking at the window.

'Peter — oh, *Peter!*' she said in a choked voice.

The picture of the Chicken Pie Supper was in the window and under it the card that said, 'Paintings of the Vermont Scene, by the late Stephen Joceneyn.'

They were all there against the soft gray walls of the big gallery — the Wilburs' silo with the great thunderheads behind it and the crows flying over; the pink-tasseled cornfield above the pond with the horses tugging at the load and the pumpkins showing on the bare ground; the hillside in July with the blue square that was oats, the rusty pink square that was redtop, the purple square that was clover, and the silvery green square that was tall timothy, all rippling in the hot wind; the sagging sugar house in the woods with snow around it on some frosty, sunny morning with the crust just melting and the sap running into buckets, the oxen, the men in their mackinaws; the auction at the old brown house with the fuchsia trees at the door.

'It only opened this morning,' Peter said, 'and one of the museums wants that one. You don't have to sell it, of course. Unless you like.'

When she could speak, she said: 'But, Peter. What made you think of doing it?'

'I'm not much of a painter,' he said, 'but I'm not such a fool that I don't know something good when I see it. And I did want to give you a — er — disengagement present — you wouldn't take the Frank Buck hat, you remember. And

the little woman and I feel we owe our long life of married happiness to you. Isn't that so, my Princess?'

'The first two weeks were all right,' his Princess admitted cautiously. 'Of course he might turn Russian any time. I expect we'll get along. The East Alcott store was always a money-maker, they tell me.'

Diana hardly heard her. She was only conscious that, through the happiness that was all around her, Stephen Joceneyn walked too.

'I can't thank you, Peter,' she said.

'That's fine. Then no one needs to thank anyone else. We'll just take it that we — well, that we belong. And part of the year, anyway, we'll be neighbors. Vermont neighbors. It means something, I've found out. And you know,' he told Nick, 'up to the time we were engaged, I liked your wife a lot.'

'I've liked her even since we've been engaged,' Nick said.

There was something in his voice, not impatience, but a controlled longing that made Diana say, 'We must go, Peter.'

She gave one last glance around the room with the record of Stephen Joceneyn's last years on the walls: his kindly understanding of his neighbors, his happy grasp of form and color, his knack of seeing beauty in common things.

'I wish you and Polly could have known him,' she said.

'Oh, but we do,' Polly said; and Peter added: 'Everyone will soon.'

'Can we find it again?' he asked.

'Find what?'

'You know.'

'Our hillside?'

'Yes.'

'Have we time to get there?'

'It's the longest day of the year.'

'Too long?'

'Yes.'

'Not long enough?'

'Yes.'

'But on the whole a pretty good day?'

'The best of all possible days,' Nicholas Joceneyn said.

Among the folds of the hills golden shadows began to move upward. The sun slid down behind Catamountain, leaving the blue scallops sharp against a clear, pale sky. The wood road was dim already.

'Is there any ditch you'd prefer me to drive into?'

'The other one was perfect — if a ditch is necessary.'

'But it isn't. We can drive up through the pasture bars. A nice dry road. The sugar-place road.'

'So we didn't need to get wet that other time. You didn't tell me that you — you ——'

'You what?'

'You darling.'

The smoke from their fire curled off into the twilight.

'Can you see to read?' he asked.

'Yes, why?'

'He asked me in his letter to give you this. It ought, I think, to be part of this day.'

She took the cheap, crumpled envelope with her name on it. Only it wasn't her name now — exactly. The neat writing on the ruled sheet was easy to read.

Miss Joceneyn,
Dear Madam,

I want you to be sure he does not feel bad about me going out this way. It is not anything to do with him at all. I guess you saw how things were with me and understood about it. Thank you for saying that about a man would not have to go around limping in the next world. I expect things will be O.K. I do not like to say anything that might not be agreeable, but I would like to have you know that it makes me glad to think that when he sees you, I will be looking at you too. It is some as if I would be still alive, only strong and young again like I was once. So thank you for all your kindness, Miss Joceneyn, for the nice flowers you brought and the picture papers and everything.

Yours respectfully

CRUSHER MAGEE

Nick Joceneyn said gently: 'I'm sorry it made you cry. I didn't want there to be a shadow on our happiness today. And yet ——'

'It — it isn't a shadow. I'm glad you gave it to me. And I don't mind crying — when it's on somebody's shoulder I love. I never did before.'

'Cry some more, then.'

'I've cried enough — for now.'

'Then tell me why you brought the peachblow vase.'

'It tells why — on a piece of paper inside it. Here.'

'Peachblow,' he read in the firelight, 'is the lovers' color. Those who see peachblow in the dawn see happiness.'

'It was silly to bring it, wasn't it?'

'Very.'

'Because I've seen it in the dawn heaps of times. And I wasn't awfully happy.'

‘Were the thrushes singing when you saw it?’

‘No.’

‘Was there crushed balsam all around you? And mist and fading stars?’

‘No.’

‘This dawn,’ he said, ‘will be different.’

THE END

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